

The Reciprocal Natural Childbirth Index

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Introduction

The rate of cesarean section births has increased alarmingly in recent years,¹ so much so that some have suggested that the procedure be offered to every woman admitted in labor to a hospital.² We³ think that's a bit much. We do believe, however, that the risks of vaginal birth in some women are so high that you might as well offer a cesarean section up front. In our experience the available biomedical risk scoring systems are not helpful. We have found that a system based on easily measured demographic and historical factors, administered at admission to the labor floor, predicts who needs a cesarean section extremely well. We call it the *Reciprocal Natural Childbirth Index*.

Methods

The *Reciprocal Natural Childbirth Index* (Table 1) is a simple additive risking instrument that can be administered in less than a minute. You can add up most of the score without even talking to the patient.

Results

We have used this index successfully for nearly a year. So far no one has scored less than 10, and the record score was 85. Of more than 100 women scoring 30 or greater, every single one ended up with a cesarean birth.

Discussion

We have found that a *Reciprocal Natural Childbirth Index* score of 30 or greater should earn the woman in labor immediate consideration for cesarean section. In fact, since you can get a score of 30 without even being in labor, someone with a high enough score could be offered a section at her con-

Table 1 Reciprocal Natural Childbirth Index

Add points as indicated if the woman:

- goes into labor Friday afternoon 5
- has checked (or her husband has checked) cervical effacement and dilation at home 5
- arrives in a late-model Volvo station wagon 5
- has a hyphenated last name 5
 - if the husband has one too 10
- is insured by a managed health care plan 5
- has more than four years of college 5
 - if either parent is a physician each, add 5
 - if either parent is an attorney each, add 10
- insists on calling all staff members by their first names 5
- brings her own naturopath to assist 5
- has a written birth plan per page, add 5
 - if printed on a word processor per page, add 10
- spends more than half of labor in the shower 5
- brings her own Walkman® 5
 - tapes are all New Age each tape, add 5

venience during regular working hours. We feel that implementing the index would save countless hours of needless labor, pain, and uncertainty.

Notes

1. Pick up any obstetrics journal.
2. *New England Journal of Medicine*, sometime in the last three years.
3. I couldn't get anyone to be a co-author on this, but I decided to use the editorial "we" anyhow.

