

The Truth About Birth Centers

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Hi, Maryn here today, with a controversial and very hot topic of the moment, I've learned, since even considering talking about birth centers. Now the truth is I have been pondering this topic for quite a while, and I've come in and out over the years of caring in a way - meaning that ultimately I want people to find what's right for them; want them to birth how and where they truly want to. But doing a lot more community education in the last couple of years and even more in the recent months, I've seen that that's a really nice idea... but there are many people caught in a place where they're not at that juncture of really making a conscious choice for themselves, but they're hungry for information. So that's where I'm coming from today when I'm talking about "The Truth About Birth Centers". This podcast would be great for anyone that is considering basically not having a hospital birth because that's essentially where birth centers come in, or maybe has already decided on having a birth center birth. I think this could serve a lot of people.

In recent months, I've done a lot more community outreach, meaning our free local workshop which has really grown in popularity (which is awesome!) So this last time we had people from all over, even outside of the state and certainly all over the state, and so - more people, more variety and more mainstream,

actually, as we grow here, which is awesome as well. So, all to say that several people at this class - and it's coming up more and more even in consults, so not in person stuff - but this idea of a birth center and people wanting to know what we think, and in the free workshop going through the basics of the physiology of birth and talking in more detail (for people that are ready) about how the place of birth really can affect the outcome, based on what we've learned. So that's my intention today; not to offend anybody. I'll probably talk a little more about that later because I think there's always the possibility of offending people with these topics. I'm not sure if I *really* care about that, but it's not my intention. My intention is to shed light on this phenomenon that has become the birth center in North America and what that means for women and families. Birth centers are a 'thing' nowadays, meaning that it's an industry. The first birth centers here in the US (even as businesses), were not until the 1970s and then birth centers really have grown in popularity and in number since then. Of course I think the idea of birthing somewhere else (other than your home) has probably always been around, right? Even if it was just a neighbor's house or – sure, babies come by accident, right, in other places sometimes, so babies are born outside the home in that way – and then think of something like Ina May's 'The Farm', which essentially was a birth center, and still is. So, those are the ideas that I had in my head before, but like I said, with just minimal research, you can see for yourself that accredited birth centers, or 'freestanding birth centers' are part of an industry and this isn't the same as what I've just talked about, so this isn't the same as "Oh, whoops, we had the baby at the midwife's office", or her house, even. I've seen that way back

in my apprenticeship. Or the Farm, way back when. This is not that. This is not just an informal agreement, this is a business structure and it relies on accrediting much like midwifery schools do and the licensing of midwives and all the politics that go along with medicalized birth. So right there, if you're planning a birth center birth, that may set off some red flags, and it may not, just depending on what you know so far, and what you're looking for. I'm definitely not here to say that a birth center doesn't suit some people. But if you view it as what it is, that can already change your thinking or just help you maybe get your questions in order.

So it is an accredited business. And the accrediting of birth centers looks like it began in the 80s, so they definitely didn't start that way but as birth centers became more popular, as a way to “one up” hospital birth in particular, they had to – and still do, really – compete with hospitals on that professional level. Whether you knew it or not, if you're in the US there is an American Association of Birth Centers, maybe no surprise, and again accreditation, or being approved and protocolled (don't know if that's a word, but...) you know, you have protocols if you're accredited, you have to agree to things to get their stamp of approval and also being reimbursed by insurance is a huge piece of birth center birth. And that may seem really obvious, especially those of you who are listening who may be choosing birth centers actually for that reason. That's kind of a related but separate discussion, I think it pays to be said out loud that they are businesses and they must be approved, they must have the stamp of approval and they work very closely with the medical system in order to accept medical reimbursement, in most cases. You know, I can't speak for every birth center, everywhere in the

US or in the world. Like I said, there's certainly informal arrangements happening. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about the accredited institutions. Some of them are staffed by more medical providers than others, so I can't even make that blanket statement at this point. Some birth centers are staffed by CNMs and perhaps even a doctor or an naturopathic doctor, and then some are purely run by midwives, licensed midwives or a combination of midwives, depending on what state the birth center resides in. I can't say anything about that, that covers each and every birth center, but in general, the points I've highlighted are true.

If you do google search, you'll see that there's not a whole lot of comparison of birth center birth to homebirth, as far as studies go. So that alone, I think, (to me, maybe not to you) is another red flag, it might not be to you, in the end, but it's another thing to note.

If we're comparing birth center birth to hospital birth, then we're considering them, in a way to be equal. So, different, but this one is better in this way, this one in this way. But in the studies, they're not being compared to homebirth, because as we'll talk about, there's kinda no comparison. OR, it's just not in the paradigm of that discussion, which is the more likely answer. Some things come up in the studies that have compared birth centers to hospital birth, which makes birth centers really attractive. Again, you listening, this may be why you've chosen a birth center, and I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that, just making it super clear. They are cheaper than hospitals, really. If you don't have insurance, I suppose if you don't have insurance, that's

probably not true. But overall, the cost has got to be less, just because the facility itself is smaller and doesn't include lots of the interventions and medications that can just be given automatically, I would assume. So I think that's pretty close to true across the board, that birth center birth would be cheaper than hospital. Even if you have insurance - I think this is actually what I mean to say initially: even if you have insurance and aren't really feeling the cost, whether it be birth center or hospital, it is cheaper for the insurance company, essentially. Sorry, that way a mouthful!

In studies, we could say that a birth center is more effective than a hospital. Now, that's a pretty loaded word: effective. But what they mean about that - at least in the study I looked at - is what you are hoping to avoid by going to a birth center as opposed to a hospital. Maybe you've had a hospital birth and you're very well-acquainted with what goes on there, and such things would be mandatory fetal monitoring and things like episiotomies, even procedures on the baby or medication for the baby that are just standard in a hospital, seems that you may have a choice in a birth center. Now I'm saying that way on purpose, because "you MAY have a choice" is about the only way to say it. There's never one way it goes, but birth centers are probably more lenient about certain things, but again, it's all comparing it to a hospital, and if you've birthed in the hospital (or even attended births in hospitals), you know that there is pretty strict protocol and lots more interventions than you'll see anywhere else. That's just a fact. I found this quote... I don't know whose blog this was, and maybe it's better that I don't say, because I think this really highlights the point of birth centers, which I think we should all be clear on. So, whoever this was comparing birth center to a

hospital said “Birth centers offer a much more individually tailored approach to birth, with the benefits of hospital birth and the freedom of a homebirth all wrapped into one”. So think about that...is that what you're looking for if you're considering a birth center? Because I think that's actually said really well, although I could nit-pick it apart. I think the person that knows what they would be getting in a birth center does think that there's some benefit, medically-speaking, just like they would get at a hospital, and it's a little homebirth-like, so it appeals to people who want a hospital birth, but want it to look like a homebirth. I think that's just something to be really clear on. The more families I meet - there definitely are families that want that, and I think that's what they should have - but more often, what I'm seeing now, especially since more people are choosing birth centers is that a higher percentage of those people don't actually want what I just said; a hospital birth that looks like a homebirth. When you put it to them like that, they suddenly back up and say “wait a minute. Is that what I really want?” That's what I'm hoping sparks many people's thought processes today as we talk more about what this enigma of a birth center actually is.

Let's talk more closely about that statement “The benefits of hospital birth and the freedom of a homebirth” Hmmmmmm... well, I think if you're someone that's considering a birth center and you agree with this statement, then what are the benefits of the hospital, really? What are they? Make your list. There's always going to be people that legitimately have these on paper, and I think that's fine. But again, the people I'm seeing are not actually looking for a hospital birth any longer because most of them have done that and for reasons we'll discuss, think that this birth center

idea is a great intermediate option between homebirth and hospital birth. But I really do think you have to believe there's a benefit to hospital and you have to know what those are for YOU. I'm not judging that at all. If the benefit of being in a hospital is that you are closer to surgery, or your baby is preterm and you need NICU help or something like that, then you probably wouldn't choose a birth center anyway, at least for the preterm situation, you'd be risked out. Legitimately, what do you feel are the benefits to a hospital birth and do you think you can get them at the birth center? The other part of that statement as well, so "the freedom of a homebirth". Of course if you haven't had a homebirth yet, you may not even know what that means or how you would see or obtain freedom having your baby at home, so maybe that's hard to answer. What does that mean to you? Does it mean that you never have to leave your house? Because that's really a freeing part of a homebirth, but it definitely isn't a part of a birth center birth. I think that's a really interesting and almost contradictory statement, although I do agree with it, I think that is what people think they're getting, but just really aren't thinking 100% about what those things mean to them.

Let's go through a couple reasons why YOU might think it's a great idea to have a baby in a birth center. [Side story, just because stories are fun: my first baby was born at a hospital, was a typical hospital birth and it was a vaginal birth, so that was kinda unusual, frankly, for a first baby, but a couple weeks before I was due, honestly I don't even remember what sparked me to go look at a birth center because we had chosen a doctor. He only attended births in the hospital and in hindsight – now this was 15 years ago- i'm guessing that it was probably the doula we hired,

and she did end up attending our hospital birth, my guess is somewhere along the way, she probably was trying to push me towards a birth center because of what I said I wanted. We toured this birth center and of course this was 15 years ago, but I can still, to this day, remember the feeling of being in there. I remember shivering (isn't that weird) the whole time. Like, out of nervousness. There was something not right about this birth center. For me. I think that's a great way to listen to yourself, honestly. In my head, what was I thinking? I think I thought it was just scary. It felt really medical, it almost felt more medical to me, than the hospital. It felt like an imitation hospital, and I just felt really uncomfortable. So we took a tour and that was it, and we really dropped the idea, funny enough, and had our hospital birth. But in hindsight, I think I was onto something. I think I picked up on an energy, at least for me, that wasn't compatible and -now that I've had many homebirths – was nothing like home. I'm not saying every birth center is like that, I know for a fact that many of them nowadays, go absolutely out of their way to be NOT institutionalized, not be sterile, all of those things. But this was 15 years ago, I don't really remember it being anything super special, looks-wise. Like I said, like a mini-hospital, with maybe some more cozy beds. Anyway, just to put it out there that I was once on this journey as well, and i'm not judging where you are, it's just thinking more clearly. I know if I had had someone to help me think more clearly about what I wanted, it may have changed some things]

So if you're considering a birth center, here's some ideas – some thoughts on my end as to why you might want one. And of course, you may have completely different ideas, and i'd love to hear that,

too. The first is kinda like the quote I read: you think that this will give you the safety of being in a hospital, but will feel better. OK...again, I would urge you to look into what you think makes a hospital safe, and research those things. Most of them, honestly, are interventions, so research the risks and benefits, and investigate the birth center for the ability to do those things. They're not hospitals; a freestanding birth center, anyway, is not attached or affiliated with a hospital. So if it's really important for you to have access to very fast medical help, for example, or some other things, then you're not really any better off there.

Another reason could be it's just a nice, attractive thing because hospital birth is sterile and cold, whether you've experienced that, or you just have heard about it, or believe that to be true. Being at home seems to be the absolute opposite end of the spectrum, meaning that "oh gosh, my house is too small, I have neighbors, I live in an apartment, it'll make a mess, what a burden it must be to birth your baby at home" You may think this birth center is this glorious in-between option, simply for looks, frankly. I'm not judging that. I think honestly, that's why a lot of people pick birth centers. I think that's why that number is rising. I think more people are becoming aware that the hospital is not where they want to be for a normal birth, but they're not comfortable at home. So here enters the beautiful, old building that has been nicely decorated with great furniture and a cozy feel, and that's attractive to people. Not knocking that, I just think there is more to it than that, and looks are deceiving. I think birth centers are one of the most deceiving things in our world of birth today. Really, if I have to say...i'll just be blunt, because I did say when I was gonna do

this podcast, i'm at the 'end of pregnancy bluntness', not rude or angry, just blunt...Birth centers are wolves in sheep's clothing. If you want the wolf, whatever that means to you, you'll know that's what you're getting, but so many people think its something its not, just because of the way it looks. Dig a little deeper. Ask yourself these questions, ask the birth center some of the questions we'll be talking about, and uncover for yourself if that feels true or not.

Another reason could be (and this goes along a little bit with what I just said) maybe you don't have a home, or a home that you feel safe in, or a home that you'd like to birth in. This isn't a judgment thing. Many people don't, but we've also been taught that birth is so structured. I've attended births outside, and in tipis, and on land off-grid, and in the in-laws' house, in the sister's house. There are so many options, that sometimes (sometimes...i know there are people that legitimately do not have homes) I think that's an excuse to do something like a birth center, because it kinda gets you off the hook from considering a homebirth. There are creative options in most places to birth a baby. Family or friends, even renting a hotel room. Many a woman has been known to do this across the country. Not to beat this one to death, just thinking more clearly about what you actually want and what you can do to make that happen.

Another reason could be that insurance won't cover a homebirth for you. I get that, and I think that's why the birth center rate is rising. But you really have to get out of that way of thinking; that birth is medical, and that a medical reimbursement should have

anything to do with your normal, healthy birth, whether it be at home or at a birth center. The hospital kinda gets us all into a predicament because the prices are so inflated that nobody wants to think about paying a hospital birth out-of-pocket – I mean, that's nightmarish, right?! Overcharging for everything and thousands and thousands of dollars. That's where insurance comes in to fund medicalized birth. So you have to change your thinking, if you've had a hospital birth and it was paid for, and if it hadn't been, you'd owe \$100,000. It really takes some understanding of this new paradigm and of birth, and listening tons of these podcasts to understand that in normal situations, birth is just birth and shouldn't cost anyone \$100,000. So, if your midwife charges even \$4000 for her 10 months of care, figuring out a way that it makes sense to you as something that is worth it. Her time is worth it, your experience is worth it, your amazing care that you'll get from her is worth it. We have to redefine what we hold as values, what we hold as true, where we think we can spend money, where we can't. Of course, it's not my job to tell anybody where they should spend money. I'm just saying considering a birth center only because it's covered by medicalized reimbursement, should maybe raise a flag for you to ponder, IF you're listening to this podcast. There are plenty of people who don't care at all, and will continue to have their medicalized births paid for and not blink an eye. But if you're listening to this, you've already had your feelers go up about a birth center, so that's my humble advice. Think about all of those things. What would you do if there wasn't a cost? What do you honestly want? Getting a birth paid for, whether it's hospital birth or birth center, ultimately

can really come back to bite you, if that's' all you care. You have to find out what you actually care about more.

My final reason – and this is valid – is that they just aren't mentally or emotionally ready for a homebirth. It's not my job to convince you otherwise. I'm simply posing questions that you may dig a little deeper into. It seems to me, though, that a lot of the birth center births are people that have had hospital births, and they're traumatized. If these people are stepping outside of their box, but if a hospital birth left you really traumatized, then you have fear, and you have issues to work through, and your partner and family might, and it can be a every complex thing to plan another birth and start to leave their fears outside of yourself. Not everybody is ready for a homebirth, and I do get that a birth center may be a stepping stone for some of those people, and so be it. People that ultimately take back their power in birth and do it the way they want is really what we're going for., but negatively speaking, I think there are a lot of people out there that will get burned by a birth center birth, and that's just the truth. It will be something that they don't expect, and I'm not just making that up. I've never even had a birth center birth myself...I've talked to women that have, and of course in my circles I'm going to hear more about the people that were disappointed. So when I had mentioned this podcast on facebook, which I usually do, just to get a feel for where people are at, that of course was the 99.99% consensus. No surprise, as these are people in a similar thinking circle as myself, but just validating women that they've worked with; maybe they were their doula, or it was their sister, that in general, birth centers are trying to be one thing, and I think they may be trying legitimately hard. I don't think anybody is being evil,

it's just that someone thought this was a great idea. In the end (not that a study is going to be done) women are unsatisfied. This isn't actually what a lot of them want. There's always that small percentage, or maybe more, that are completely satisfied with their birth center birth. I'm just being honest about what I've heard and what I know. If you are someone that is considering these things, I think it's great to hear both sides. No scenario is the perfect one for everybody. Those are some reasons why I think people choose birth center birth, and i don't think any of them are stupid or not valid, i just think that they're different, and i think sometimes people can move on, and sometimes they don't and that's ok too.

To talk a little about that, i do want to repeat that it is a choice, and i don't believe in judging people for making the choices that are right for them, because if we do that, we're no better than the doctors that say "homebirth is dangerous" or "homebirth sucks" or "homebirth is a stupid choice" or all of the nasty things that we know they say. I'm not on that team: of being awful. I think people should make the right choice for them and i do think that birth center is right for some people. The benefits are all compared to hospital birth, so i want to be clear on that. Really, the same conversation, in a way, could be had about midwives at home, you know?! We know there is this huge and growing population of midwives, and the segment of midwifery that is indeed medicalized, and that's largely the regulation of midwifery. So, i could just repeat this podcast about homebirth with medicalized midwives, you know? Watch out who you're choosing, watch out

what you might get. I probably won't do that, because that would be boring, but i think the same things are true, there's just something about birth centers (maybe because they're more mainstream at this point), there are more people considering it than a homebirth.

When I talked about doing this podcast on facebook, there was a 99% support and agreement and lots of great comments about how this is true, and I didn't really even say much on the post, i just said "i'm gonna do a podcast about birth centers and I'm not going to beat around the bush" I think that's all I said, so it wasn't even a negative statement, and I did that on purpose. And there were more comments that were more detailed, people saying the things I've said today already. I think only one comment to the contrary, and that comment was similar to what I'm sure there were echoes of out there - although truthfully probably not by anyone who's gotten this far into this podcast - but the idea was that we are being judgemental, that we are judging women's choices and HOW DARE WE act like birth center isn't a great idea. And that, I could really go on a rant about, because - well, first of all, when the comment comes from a midwife, you have to consider that, right? This isn't a woman who birthed at a birth center saying "hey, my birth center was absolutely idyllic, absolutely what i wanted" and having 100s of women saying "we love our birth centers...don't blah, blah, blah..." No, it wasn't that at all. It was a midwife saying "you're being judgmental because..." well, the obvious is that midwives work at birth centers. I'm not saying that to be gossipy, i'm saying that because if you are considering a birth center, then consider that the midwives working there do believe in what they're doing, and

that's fine, they should! But they're not going to be transparent with you, most of them, and they're not going to answer your questions 100% transparently because they have invested interest in this industry called Birth Centers. That could be related to money and power. I won't say it can't be more than that. As a midwife, I'm sure there are midwives that have their hearts in birth centers, and this is their love and they love serving families there. But we can't really extract from this industry that wants to control how you birth. People are welcome to say what they want and midwives in particular, I'm imagining will continue to feel like birth centers are amazing, as they pay their bills and such. They may feel like they are really doing something awesome for their community with a birth center, and they might be. But that really wasn't my point. I think that's actually more judgmental: to not want to tell women the truth and act like you know better about what their choices should be. Little gossip kinda stuff there, but I think it's totally missing the point to want to paint anything as the perfect scenario for anyone. There isn't such a scenario, and this is really about choices we can make as women and mothers for our births, this shouldn't be about regulations and money and insurance.

Just to tie up that package, I'm not negative about birth centers, if one feels like they really are serving the purpose. You can't discount the 100s of families that do not even know what they're getting. In the end, we need to be transparent about all the options. There are risks and benefits, pluses and minuses to all sorts of scenarios in birth, even something like freebirth, or a midwife-attended birth at home. Nothing is perfect, it's just not that way. I also thought it was curious for a midwife to say that this

was judgmental, to even talk about birth centers not being the be-all and end-all because it's really Old Paradigm to me. I think in this new paradigm of birth we talk honestly we speak openly and we don't, in the end, care what anyone does. But we don't keep things from people that we know to be true because that doesn't make a lot of sense, as far as people feeling powerful. That keeps them under control of something, whether it's you or your beliefs or the system of medicalized birth that has absolutely strangled us as a culture for decades now. So it is time to unravel ourselves from this strangulation and talk about the truth. A wolf in sheep's clothing is my way of describing a birth center. That is absolutely the best way to say it, and why are these centers - most of which are midwife-run - ok with selling themselves as the hospital alternative, or the homebirth alternative? Why are they such chameleons, that's one of my biggest questions. If you are considering a birth center birth...what do you want, and do you think you're really gonna get that? Now, you won't really know, to be honest, until you're on the other side. They can talk and talk and tell you all kinds of thing, but you won't really know if you get what you want until you're on the other side. But what is it with birth centers trying to be everything to everyone?

I have personal experience with women that have left birth centers (a lot of the women that I see and have seen in years past). Why are they told one thing, when that's definitely not the way it goes? The biggest example is that birth centers have by definition, because they're accredited. They have strict protocols, and if you aren't aware of that, that's something that should be #1 on your list: What are the rules that the birth center follows? How does that impact you? What rules must you follow to be a patient

at the birth center? Because the homey rooms, The cute decor can throw people off from asking these questions. The midwives are happy in many birth centers to just say whatever needs to be said. Saying such things as “No, you can have the birth you want, this is no different than home”. Not true! If they are accredited, which they sorta have to be (unless you’re just birthing off-grid somewhere at the midwife's office) they have protocols, very strict, actually rules and regulations. Usually more strict than homebirth regulations, if there are such things in your state.

That’s sorta my beef right there. Be honest about who you are. If you’re a birth center, be honest about it. Say “We can do this, not that”. I’m not sure why that isn’t being said in a lot of places. Why are they selling themselves as homebirth? That is not homebirth. If you’re looking for homebirth, have a home birth. If you’re looking for a hospital birth, with all the bells and whistles, have a hospital birth. A birth center is not some miraculous combination of those two. And if it is, to me that’s just a mess. It makes no sense. I would say that from my perspective - in my opinion, my experience - this full disclosure isn’t happening. Women are signing up for birth center births and they are not aware. They are just thinking it’s pretty and nice and homey and holistic and in the end it may turn out to be very few of those things. Being misled is something that is not cool and I think we have responsibility, frankly, to women to not be misled. I’m not blaming the birth centers for tricking people into entering their doors. I think as consenting human beings, we have the ability to ask questions and ultimately we have the choice, so it’s not anyone's fault that women are being misled, but I think they are. Many a woman, if you ask, will say that they didn’t get what they thought they would.

Is it the right match for you? Great question. Here are some fine print things that came to mind, which may apply to your birth center that you may want to check into.

Not every place is the same, but if the birth center is priding itself on being pretty and like a homebirth, you really should be suspicious, because a homebirth takes place at your home, and you have a lot more control, even if you were to hire a licensed midwife. So ask these questions or look them up in your state: What rules and regulation does the birth center follow? Can you get a straight answer out of any of the midwives there? Better yet, can you get a hard copy of their rules? Things to wonder about: what do they do with you when you go post-dates? There is a birth center in Arizona that transfers care of women after 41 weeks, so you're likely to have a hospital OB "let you" go longer than that! That's an example of a birth center being even more restrictive than the protocol that applies to homebirth midwifery practice in your state as a licensed midwife. If you think you're gonna have more flexibility at a birth center, you may not. You may have even less flexibility than you'd have in a hospital. Get ahold of those regulations and protocol and that should not be weird for something to ask that as a paying customer. The fact that they don't have those documents right there, ready to hand out (well we all know why...but they should be) That's your business, if you're going to sign on as a customer because it will probably ultimately affect you, especially if you're having a first baby.

And that's another question: what is the % of women that you risk out of care. I don't know how to advise you to get an honest

answer to these things. I think there's many Drs and all kinds of practitioners that don't tell the truth (their c-section rate or whatever). Specifically with first-time moms, if you are one. What's the % of first-time moms that birth in the birth center and have a successful birth. It's probably lower and more depressing than you thought. It might actually be higher in your hospital. No way to tell you how to determine what the real truth is, but I think they're great pointed questions to ask, and I would add that any birth center (and for that matter, any midwife or doctor) that won't give you an answer to these questions or gets argumentative or acts defensive or that it won't matter for you, says something like "don't worry about the 42 week thing, I'll let you go past 42 weeks", Don't believe any of it! In the end, you'll be the one standing there with nobody to care for you, because the protocol will come before you.

That's my best advice, with any kind of interview process, specifically with birth centers: get a hard copy: what is being followed, can you read them, have them, study them. Then you feel into and talk about with your partner or family, how that might affect you and how you feel about that. The risk-out policies are extensive, usually. That's not just me being negative; google birth center or risk-out policy. Women all over saying the same thing, that they got risked out of a birth center at the last minute or they failed their glucose test, or things that won't get you kicked out of a hospital, will get you kicked out of a birth center, so if you're picture perfect in every way, then you are gonna be one of the few to be able to have a birth there, but this isn't going to happen for as many women as you think. And you very well could not be one of them

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Another question to ask is: How long can you be there? When can you arrive? What happens if you come and they determine you're not really in labor: if you arrive at 2am and someone has to drive from their house in the cold and unlock the door, you can bet they're gonna bet they're gonna make sure you're gonna have a baby soon. No one's gonna hang around for days and wait for you at the birth center. How does this affect you? Your idea of this labor and birth? Do you really want to leave your house? If you do get to birth at the birth center, when do you have to go home? Even in a hospital, you can stay longer and they are doing all kinds of stuff to you, but you are there and you don't have to get in your car and put a 1-hour old baby in a car seat. What are the rules around that? Do you want to be in the car before and after birth? Find out their transport rate, especially for first time moms. If you feel like they aren't being honest (even if you feel like they are being honest), talk to other people. Talk to people that have used the birth center. Specifically first time moms, they will give you the best read on how they actually handle birth. The same could be said for homebirth midwives or hospital OBs. How do they handle first labors, because those are generally the longest and the most intense for everybody. If everybody from the birth center gets shipped off to the hospital after 12 hours of labor, then that may not be the best choice for you, especially if you're having your first baby.

Consider that birth centers are a business, they're like hospitals in their setup, there's usually an administrator. It's a business, they're more public and visible, not your little granny homebirth midwife who drives from house to house on her bike, it's not an

underground midwife. This is front and center, building on main street. They have a public persona to appeal to, and honestly, that's how they get a lot of business. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy. They are what they want to be, and that's painted in the public eye, and they have to act to keep their image. By that I mean they aren't going to bend the rules for you. They aren't going to, because one birth that doesn't go well, if it's put on them at any point, then you've put in jeopardy their entire business. All of the women after you. For as many birth centers as there are in the US, many are in danger of closing.. Not saying these are absolutely money-making machines, they're always being highlighted by the medical community because they are so public. It's just something to consider.

Another question to ask is about their relationship with the hospital. A freestanding birth center shouldn't have a formal arrangement; they're not part of a hospital. I think this question could go either way, depending on what you want. If you want a great relationship with a hospital, then I think there are birth centers that legitimately have that, and they feel good about that, and it's a selling point for their kind of customer. But if you're not, if you're towards the homebirth side, you might be uncomfortable with their close hospital relationship. Only you can decide if that's a good thing or not.

A couple more thoughts: in my opinion and what I've seen, birth centers do not allow women to own their births in the same way and there are many people that would argue with me and it's mostly midwives that will say birth center births are so great and hands-off, but it's not happening in her home. I don't think it can be as personal, I think it's another example of women still not

accepting the responsibility for whatever reason. There are tons of reasons why someone wouldn't, and I think birth centers are happy to fill that hole. Being more business-like, more professional, these are things that appeal to people, but they haven't thought if that applies to birth or not.

I do think birth centers are a compromise. I don't think that's a judgment thing at all. They are a compromise. Not hospital, not home. If they are trying to be both, you can't! Why do you try? Pick what you're good at. I don't understand. Remember that when the medical world was viewing birth, they consider hospital birth to be the standard, and out-of-hospital birth, which is a new phrase, is not the standard. In my mind, because homebirth is my world, I don't ever say "out-of-hospital birth", because my standard is not hospital, my standard is home. But birth centers fall under out-of-hospital birth. That's just another way of saying that THAT is the paradigm. It's a homey sort-of hospital, and it's a very hard transition, I think, to say that birth centers are closer to home; they're not! Is it a step up or not? From the hospital...probably. From home...definitely not.

I do think birth centers also trying really hard to fit in with the medical world. That's what I'm hoping to illuminate today: not that you can't choose one, but is it actually what you want? Is it the comfy, cozy couch? These birth centers can be gorgeous, beautiful and historic and amazing. Is that really most important to you? Do you see how that's trying to appeal to a part of you that may or may not actually be important? I do think if you desire the amenities of a hospital (even drugs or pain relief in labor) then being in a place where you can get the full menu of medical help

makes more sense. The practicalities of a birth center need to be considered. You may have some new things to ask now, some new ideas to play with, but the practicalities of a birth center are: You have to leave your house! If you don't know why that's not a good thing, then take our 5-week course, read Sarah Buckley's book GENTLE BIRTH, GENTLE MOTHERING, listen to more podcasts, and learn how the body works. Just like a dog or cat or cow or any other mammal will birth, we are no different. If you took a dog in labor from your closet and put her in the middle of the road in the cold, she would stop labor. The hormones of labor are beautiful and mysterious but yet specific. Leaving your house, as one quote goes, "the first intervention in birth that a healthy woman takes is when she walks out the front door of her house in labor. From that first intervention, all others will follow". Michael Rosenthal, OB. I take real issue, once I'm feeling pretty feisty about it, that any midwife worth her salt would advise a woman to do such a thing. That is against all the hallmarks of midwifery care that I can think of. Of course there exceptions of not having a home etc., but truthfully, in the US and most places birth centers are really being used by women who have means to do so. We're not serving all kinds of struggling populations, necessarily. Those women, unfortunately are still going to the hospital. They don't have the knowledge or money to consider a birth center. I really think that while we're aware of being privileged while we talk about such subjects, these are mostly educated, well-off women that are choosing birth centers. That's my point there. I don't know what midwife would ever encourage someone to leave their house. Afterwards, of course, you have to put your baby in a car, and all kinds of germs live there that don't live at your house. Is

that what you want? The same is true of a hospital, but somehow that doesn't get talked about either. Birth center seeming more like a homebirth might make you think more carefully that they aren't your germs, actually. The tub was probably scrubbed with some disgusting toxic cleaner and will be after you leave, for the next person.

It is a facility. It is not home, no matter what they say or how it looks. It is state regulated, there is protocol, there is liability. It is not autonomous in any way. Don't fall for the packaging, I say. I personally don't think its progress to have tons of birth centers in the US. Many midwives will disagree, but you know what? They are the same midwives who disagree with me on regulations and licensing. They think that regulation is really facilitating more homebirths, when really, its just limiting choices. I want a higher standard for us as a culture and our generations to come. I want birth to continue to belong to the family at home, with full responsibility and choices. No regulation and no one over them telling them how, when, where and all of those things. That's my honest truth about birth centers today, not that it won't be something some people ultimately choose, but the picture i've painted today, i think, is fairly accurate and if nothing else, might bring up some questions that you will want to ask and ponder within yourself.

Thanks for listening today. Check out the Indie Birth site, we've done a makeover (or Margo has) and hopefully you can still find things there and see our classes and join our Wise Woman Circle. Have a great day. Thanks so much.