

Maternal Health Care Patient Perspective: Lived Experience

Charity S. Watkins, Ph.D., MSW

I have no disclosures or conflicts of interest.

About Me

- Assistant Professor in the Department of Social Work
- Building Interdisciplinary Research Careers in Women's Health (BIRCWH) Scholar
- Daughter
- Mother
- Wife
- WomenHeart Champion
- Board Chair for Equity Before Birth



All of these identities and roles I hold have been informed or impacted by one thing:



Pregnancy-related Cardiovascular Disease

My Diagnostic Journey

Pre-existing Conditions:

- Obesity
- Family history of heart disease (mom & dad)

- Annual exams
- No hospital stays
- Wisdom tooth extraction is only surgery

During Pregnancy:

- Shortness of breath (applied for handicapped parking)
- Gestational diabetes

- Prenatal visits with OB
- Prepared birthing classes
- Ultrasounds
- Hospital tour

During Labor/Delivery:

- 10 days post EDD
- Unplanned cesarean delivery
- Postpartum hemorrhage & manual clot evacuation

- Membrane sweep
- Scheduled labor induction (Foley bulb & pitocin)
- Epidural

Postpartum (< 2 months):

- Severe shortness of breath
- Nagging cough
- Can't lay flat
- Extreme fatigue
- Nausea and vomiting
- Radiating pain in left arm & jaw
- Chest pain
- Difficulty breathing

- OB visit at 3 weeks— flu diagnosis
- OB visit at 6 weeks— postpartum depression diagnosis
- Outpatient postpartum depression counseling with NP
- ER visit—not seen by doctor after waiting 5.5 hours
- Campus Health appt 3 days after ER visit

- Physical exam & chest x-ray at Campus Health reveals edema in legs, fluid in lungs, & enlarged heart
- Wheelchaired to ER—after waiting to see a doctor for several hours, finally brought back where I am diagnosed with congestive heart failure with an EF of 5-10%

- Receive Lasix intravenous in ER
- Admitted to Cardiac Intensive Care Unit
- Begin heart medication regimen/restart regimen
- Temporary central line in neck
- 2 months of cardiac rehab
- Regular cardiology appointments
- Ongoing medication management
- Genetic testing

- Lost 20 lbs of fluid within 2 days of being admitted
- Had negative reaction to beta blocker medication—coded
- Discharged from hospital after 2 weeks
- Ongoing care from cardiologist
- TTN genetic mutation identified/passed down from dad
- Mom passes away from cardiac arrest
- Genetic testing for daughter

Initial Patient Symptoms

Patient engagement with healthcare system

Evaluation & Diagnosis

Treatment

Outcomes



Error should never be normalized.

We have the resources to do better.

If the financial costs are not enough,
the human costs should be.

We Deserve Diagnostic
Excellence

In remembrance of the woman who gave me my first
heart beat
I love and miss you, Ma



And for the reason my heart continues to beat
I love you, Margeaux



Ways to stay in contact with me



cwatkins33@nccu.edu
charity.watkins@duke.edu



Charity Watkins



@drcswatkins



<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8006-0331>



NC Central
UNIVERSITY

Duke UNIVERSITY
BIRCWH