

Rural IMPACT Sprint

Improving Maternal & Perinatal Access, Care, and Teamwork

Foundations of Obstetric Emergency Readiness

September 17, 2026

SESSION OVERVIEW

Presenter: Lisa Mattson, MD

The session focused on preparing healthcare facilities of various types, including emergency departments, urgent care centers, and rural clinics, to handle life-threatening obstetric emergencies. The session aimed to establish a high-level framework rooted in the Alliance for Innovation on Maternal Health (AIM) 5 R's (Readiness, Recognition & Prevention, Response, Reporting & Systems Learning, and Respectful Care) to help rural facilities assess their current strengths, identify system gaps, and navigate real-world staffing and transfer constraints.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Assess Readiness & Culture:

Emergency preparedness covers people, processes, equipment, systems, and culture. Ensure staff know where medications are stored and have an accessible quick reference for their use and any contraindications. Prioritize a strong safety culture that empowers staff to speak up, and ensure emergency plans account for two patients (mother and infant).

2. Know the Early Warning Signs:

The fetal heart rate strip is a key vital sign and may show distress before maternal vital signs change. With hypertension in pregnancy, assume preeclampsia and seizure risk until ruled out. Do not assume all abdominal pain is pregnancy-related; consider non-OB surgical causes, such as gallbladder attacks, Crohn's disease, or ovarian torsion.

3. Use the 5-Minute Action Chain:

Follow **CALL→STABILIZE→COMMUNICATE→PREPARE→TRANSFER**. Always call for help first and direct orders to specific individuals (e.g., "Mary, start the IV") using closed-loop communication, and assign a Team Lead if no physician is present.

4. Establish Transfer & Respectful Care Protocols:

Recognize as early as possible when your team is not equipped to safely care for the obstetric emergency and initiate transfer. Ensure that the team is transferring to a facility with the appropriate level of care capacity based on gestational age and blood bank access. During acute crises, remain calm, use plain language with patients and families, and follow up the next day to answer questions, using teach-back and debriefs whenever possible.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Obstetric emergencies can happen at any point in pregnancy, and severe hemorrhage and preeclampsia pose major morbidity concerns. With labor and delivery closures increasing demand on rural facilities, all teams must be prepared to rapidly recognize, stabilize, and escalate care.

ADDITIONAL DETAILS

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Slide Deck: To request access to the slides, please email QI@minnesotaperinatal.org

Questions: Please direct any questions about this session content to QI@minnesotaperinatal.org & lmattson@comcast.net

Learn More: Visit mnpqc.org/initiative/rural-impact-sprint/

RESOURCES SHARED:

- **[AIM Obstetric Emergency Readiness Resource Kit:](#)** The AIM Obstetric Emergency Readiness Resource Kit is a collection of best practices to aid in readiness efforts to appropriately care for patients experiencing obstetric emergencies in non-obstetric or lower-resource settings. This resource kit may particularly benefit those who do not typically provide obstetric services or encounter obstetric emergencies
- **[Step Up Together Transfer Simulation Drill Kits:](#)** Step Up Together is a program from [Primary Maternity Care](#) and supports hospitals, homes, birth centers, or emergency medical teams through live transfer drills and other initiatives. Of their services, Step Up Together offers drill kits that are ready-made guides for healthcare teams to test and practice responding to an emergency while moving a patient from a community-based setting into the hospital. Drill Kits include step-by-step instructions, detailed clinical prompts, and observer worksheets.
- **[Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses \(AWHONN\) Obstetric Patient Safety \(OPS\): OB Emergencies Workshop:](#)** As part of its effort to reduce the rising trend of maternal mortality in the United States, AWHONN developed the Obstetric Patient Safety (OPS): OB Emergencies Workshop, now in its 4th Edition. The curriculum for this program is guided by the leading causes of maternal morbidity and mortality. The focus of the workshop is on various obstetric emergencies that may occur at any point during pregnancy or in the postpartum period.
- **[MNPQC's 2026 Perinatal Improvement Summit:](#)** This event offers an "All Teach, All Learn" environment to share knowledge, resources, and expertise while building connections across disciplines and communities in the perinatal space. This year's theme, *Uniting to Advance Perinatal Health*, highlights collaboration among clinicians, doulas, nurses, advocates, community organizations, public health professionals, and families.

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