

Drug-free way to ease pain of childbirth

BIRTH from D1 trained 1,000 instructors, 700 of them in the last three years. She had held training sessions as far away as England and Australia, and her 1998 book, *HypnoBirthing: A Celebration of Life*, is being translated into French.

Not everyone is buying it. Denise Roy, director of The Birth Center in Bryn Mawr, which gets about five or six hypnobirthers a month, said the technique was "a wonderful tool to help cope with labor and delivery. It does not make for a pain-free delivery. There's no such thing."

Hurley, who says she has never been a "mind body, yoga kind of person," was also skeptical at first. But as she read testimonials on the Internet from women who had done it, she decided to give it a try.

Last fall, she took a four-week course from instructor Loretta Tretina during which she practiced relaxation and visualization to help her remain calm during the labor and delivery.

The goal is to become so relaxed, so focused on a mental image — a peaceful place, a tranquil scene, a favorite color — that the mother is distracted from the pain.

During their first class, Tretina asked Hurley to imagine a warm, cozy kitchen. Later Hurley would imagine herself floating on a colorful bed of mist, or riding a raft in a gentle ocean.

Even after taking the course, though, she was worried that it was too "kooky" to work.

"I didn't embrace it wholeheartedly," said Hurley, who lives in Springfield, Delaware County, with her husband, Paul, and two children. "My husband and I used to laugh on the way home."

But when her doctor warned her that she would have a big baby, and would probably need a cesarean, "I knew I had to give it a try," she said.

People have used hypnosis to have babies for years, but it became more mainstream after Mongan, an educator and hypnotherapist, formalized her theories on childbirth in 1989.

Mongan had used self-hypnosis to deliver her own four children.

"I had four children with absolutely no pain whatsoever, and this was when women were totally anesthetized and the baby was delivered with forceps," said the 68-year-old grandmother. "I brought myself to such a totally relaxed state, without an aspirin or anything."

Mongan based her teachings on the works of Grantly Dick-Read, an English obstetrician who believed that fear and tension cause pain and that profound relaxation produces an opiate like effect on the body.

She has no studies or data to prove her theories, just "the serene look on a woman's face" as she brings a baby into the world.

"There's actually no scientific



Robin Frees teaches a class in Malvern on hypnobirthing. "Some mothers need help," she says, "but you don't have to apply all the wonders of obstetrics to every birth."

who has been using hypnosis on his patients for 25 years. Goldman said the practice had kept his cesarean rate at 5 percent, compared with the national rate of 20 percent.

He credited a New York obstetrician named Bill Warner with first using hypnosis to deliver babies in the 1950s. He believed that pain was a learned process in childbirth.

"Through hypnosis we can teach people to unlearn the response they learned to contractions," said Goldman, who studied with Warner.

"It's nice to give control back to the patients. Labor and delivery should be a very happy, enjoyable time. It shouldn't be a holler, scream-fest where everyone is uncomfortable," he said.

Maybe not, but to say childbirth is not painful is "nonsense," said Thomas J. Bader, an assistant professor and director of general obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Pennsylvania.

When muscles contract, as they do during labor, there is a buildup of lactic acid, which stimulates pain fibers, he said. "What frustrates me about this whole approach," Bader said, "is why can't there be pain? The debate about whether or not there is pain is irrelevant. The important part is how they [mothers] deal with it, how they get through it; and whether they have a successful outcome, in terms of the mom's health and happiness and the baby's."

It's that kind of bottom-line thinking that irritates hypnobirthers who believe the quality of the birthing experience is just as important as a successful outcome.

"Some mothers need help, but you don't have to apply all the wonders of obstetrics to every birth," said Robin Frees, who teaches hypnobirthing in Malvern. "Why does childbirth need to be medically man-

to use a midwife instead of doctors for her second baby, due in October. With the pain of her first delivery etched in her memory, she decided to give hypnobirthing a try.

During a recent session, with the lights dimmed and soothing music in the background, she settled into a comfortable chair, closed her eyes, and listened to reassuring "affirmations" about the birthing process.

"You can control your entire body with your mind," Frees said softly, reading from a script.

Because a birthing partner is so important, Lockwood's husband, Dave, was by her side. He would encourage her to relax by reciting some of the script and by helping her visualize a relaxing scene.

But at this session, he just fell asleep. Lockwood, a 40-year-old malpractice lawyer from Doylestown, said she was hoping hypnosis would put her "in control" of her delivery.

But childbirth goes much smoother if you just let go, according to Julie Crystal, director of Midwifery Associates at Pennsylvania Hospital.

"Part of what we have to do in labor ... is accept the fact that this is a physical process that we cannot control. We have to let it happen.... What happens with these techniques, we use it as a way to stay in control. In a way," she said, "that's counterproductive, and it also sets you up for failing."

When it came time for Hurley to deliver at HUP, a crew from the Discovery Channel was at the hospital and featured her in a show that was telecast last month.

In the show, Hurley is lying on her side with her eyes closed while Tretina strokes her forearm. From time to time, she raises a finger to indicate she is having a contraction, a big contrast to the thrashing about she did with her first child.

At one point, inthenews2.tif

Then he suggests Pitocin to move her labor along. Hurley declines.

Another doctor keeps offering her an epidural, which she had said at the start she didn't want.

Though she is very still, Hurley remains alert and seems comfortable. When contractions came, she said later, she visualized herself floating over the crest of a wave and then back down into a calm sea.

Best of all, until the last 90 minutes, when she had to push, she experienced very little pain.

"I was really concentrating, really focusing on being relaxed," a beaming Hurley says on the video, with her husband by her side, minutes after she delivered 9-pound, 4-ounce Grace, who was already nursing.

"I wouldn't say it was painful, but it kept me in control. I feel like it was an accomplishment of a lifetime."

So happy was she with the outcome that she recently took a four-day course to become an instructor.

Kathy Bocella's e-mail address is kbocella@phillynews.com

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