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Professional Program Development in Natural Family Planning

Thomas W. Hilgers, M.D., CNFPE

Since preparing the following paper, Doctor Hilgers has begun a new institute, the Pope Paul VI Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction, 6901 Mercy Road, Omaha, Nebraska 68106

The field of natural family planning is changing rapidly. These changes are of particular importance to Catholic hospitals and Catholic health care facilities, since the changes are in the direction of the development of professional delivery mechanisms for natural family planning education and service programs. Because of the nature of a hospital, the physicians, administrators and those involved in quality assurance monitoring are particularly interested in services such as natural family planning being delivered on the most professional of levels.

In the past, teachers of natural family planning have not been adequately trained and the services they have provided have not always been at the level which could be considered professional. However, recent changes have occurred in this and, through the research of the Creighton University Natural Family Planning Education and Research Center, a professional education program for teachers has been developed and a professional service delivery model has been implemented! While many Catholic hospitals have "Creighton Model" programs, many more are relatively unfamiliar with these recent advances in natural family planning. It is the purpose of this paper to update the knowledge and interest in these recent advances and also to challenge Catholic health care facilities to administratively support the development of a professional natural family planning program in their facilities.

From the purely pragmatic point of view, a natural family planning program has an opportunity to bring new patients into the hospital or health care facility program. It is another opportunity for the hospital to develop an outreach program into the community and to attract individuals, generally married couples with young families, to their health care facility. From a service point of view, it is exciting to see the potential

which natural family planning has for married couples. In this latter area, with natural family planning provided within a professional setting, the hospital can be assured that the services it provides are quality oriented and worthwhile.

In the "Creighton Model", programs of service, education and research excellence have been developed which meet the demands of the allied health professions. The model was developed out of a great need to provide *competent* services to new client/couples who seek natural family planning education. An additional motivation was the need to develop the community based credibility of natural family planning services. In addition, this model blends the best fundamentals of Christian ethics in the area of human reproduction and professionalism so that Christian service can be provided through *Christian professionalism*.

Service, Education and Research

All services in natural family planning must be firmly grounded in sound scientific research. The service and education components of the "Creighton Model" have all been developed within the context of fundamentally sound research. It is upon research that both education and service programs are developed. Ultimately, the new client/couple who seeks natural family planning services are the benefactors (see Figure 1). Not enough can be said about the importance of research in the development of these services, it is that important! Nonetheless, research should never stand by itself. Only when it is integrated with education and service can it fully realize its practical goals.

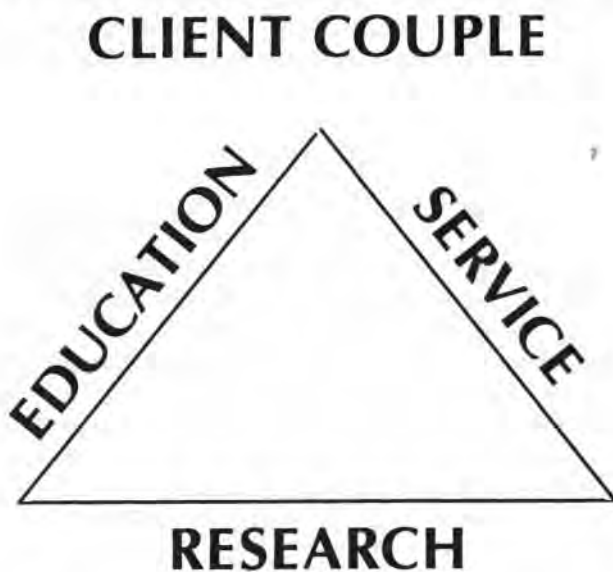


Figure 1.

Research

The Creighton University Natural Family Planning Education and Research Center has distinguished itself in two broad areas of research: the basic science aspects and the educational components of natural family planning.

Since the inception of the Creighton University Natural Family Planning Education and Research Center eight years ago, the basic science research component has involved itself in conducting and publishing studies which correlate the hormones of the menstrual cycle with various parameters of natural family planning.²⁻⁶ In addition, statistical surveys of the effectiveness of the Ovulation Method of Natural Family Planning have been conducted and a statistical model or protocol has been developed for the continued evaluation of natural methods of family planning.⁷⁻⁹ Basic research has also gone into correlating the signs of the cervical mucus with various gynecologic disorders, the evaluation of pregnancies which occur in users of natural family planning, the study of user behavior in fulfilling intention: use and major studies in further evaluating the normal fertility state and infertility.¹⁰

In the area of educational research, the center has been involved in the development of a natural family planning core curriculum for the education of new family planning teachers.¹¹ This curriculum is unique in that it is designed to meet the demands of the allied health professions. It is clearly the most thorough and complete education program available in the United States. This core curriculum has been the foundation upon which six different educational programs (all certificate programs) have been developed and integrated. These educational programs are designed to train new teachers, to educate those who will themselves train new teachers, to train medical consultants and to educate priests, religious and non-Catholic clergy.

Education

The educational component of the core curriculum is truly an *integrated system of education*. It integrates the education which the teacher of natural family planning receives with that received by the client. This, in addition, is integrated with a program of education provided to those individuals who educate the new teachers. The educational programs are also *competency based*. This latter component allows the developing skills of the new teacher and educator to be measured so that adequate quality control and service can be monitored. This educational process is the only one currently available which will ultimately lead to *certification* by the *American Academy of Natural Family Planning*.

In the "Creighton Model", there are two programs available for learning how to *teach* natural family planning. These new teachers are called Natural Family Planning Practitioners (NFPP) and Natural Family Planning Instructors (NFPI). The Natural Family Planning Practitioner

curriculum is one year in duration while the Natural Family Planning Instructor program is six months in duration. The first program allows the teacher the full advantage of both basic and advanced teaching skills while the instructor program provides only those skills which would be considered basic.

In the area of the development of new educational programs, the "Creighton Model" trains certain Natural Family Planning Practitioners to become either Natural Family Planning Educators (NFPE) or Natural Family Planning Supervisors (NFPS). The Natural Family Planning Educators are trained specifically to develop new educational programs based on the "Creighton Model" at sites other than Creighton University. At the present time, there are seven other sites currently operational or in development (see Figure 2) and many more are in the process. The following is a list of the names and addresses of the individual programs and their program directors.



Figure 2

1. Thomas W. Hilgers, M.D., CNFPE, Program Director, Creighton University, Natural Family Planning Education Programs, 601 N. 30th St., *Omaha*, NE 68131, 402-280-4430.
2. Shirley Hoefler, CNFPE, Program Director, St. Joseph Hospital Natural Family Planning Center, 400 Walter N.E., *Albuquerque*, NM 87102, 505-848-8000.
3. Sr. Nuala O'Connor, CNFPE, Program Director, 43 Lewin Road, Streatham, London, *England* SW 16.
4. Phyllis White, CNFPE, Program Director, Natural Family Planning of Greater Kansas City, Inc., 13106 E. 53rd Terrace, *Kansas City*, MO 64133, 816-358-6358.
5. Donald Kramer, CNFPE, Program Director, Twin Cities Natural Family Planning Center, Inc., St. Mary's Hospital, 2414 S. Seventh St., *Minneapolis*, MN 55454, 612-340-9830.
6. Bert Dufour, CNFPE, Program Director, 11 Sanborn Dr., *Nashua*, NH 03063, 603-880-1914.
7. Terry Maes, CNFPE, Program Director, Natural Family Planning Education and Resource Center of California, O'Connor Hospital-Center for Life, 2105 Forest Ave., *San Jose*, CA 95128, 408-947-2727.
8. Joanne Doud, CNFPE, Program Director, St. Francis Regional Medical Center, 929 N. St. Francis, *Wichita*, KS 67214, 316-268-5000.

In addition to the programs for natural family planning teachers and their educators, there is a special program for physicians, the Natural Family Planning Medical Consultant (NFPMC) Program and a program for clergy and religious, both of which are six month programs of education.

The core curriculum for the NFPP is one year in duration. It provides both a *theoretical foundation* and *clinical experience*. The clinical experience is offered with expert supervision. The theoretical foundation is attained through educational phases which are approximately five months apart. These two phases are held on the campus of the educational program itself. The first educational phase provides basic theory in natural family planning while the second provides advanced theory. The clinical experience is provided in two supervised practica. The supervised practica are conducted at the student's own home location. Supervision is provided by long distance. The first practicum allows the students to develop their basic clinical skills while the second allows for the development of their advanced teaching skills. Included in the second practicum is an *on site visitation* in which each teacher is site-visited by an expert supervisor giving an opportunity to witness and monitor directly the student's teaching skills.

The core curriculum contains a complete education in the scientific and philosophical foundations of natural family planning including *all natural methods*. In addition, the student receives an education in the basic and advanced teaching skills, basic and advanced case management, basic

and advanced business aspects, basic and advanced behavioral issues and practical teaching experience all conducted under supervision. These components, while not all inclusive, do provide the students with a *true education* in natural family planning so that when they meet new couples and begin their teaching, they may respond and evaluate problems comprehensively, independently and professionally.

Service

In providing service, there are many components of the Creighton system which are unique. All of the components ultimately allow for the development of quality natural family planning services in which the quality can be assured. Some of these components are standardization, individual follow-up, case management, outreach, pregnancy evaluation, maintenance of records and long-term follow-up.

Standardization is the process which assures that each client has equal access to the important information in learning natural family planning. It also allows the teacher to assess the client's knowledge and application of the method. Such standardization is *essential* to the development of a *quality control program* and it is necessary for the *measurement of competence* in teachers.

The individual follow up component of the "Creighton Model" assures that each individual client/couple receives adequate attention to their learning needs in natural family planning. It allows for all questions to be asked and also answers to be provided. Such individual attention is critical to the success of natural family planning.

Case management is a unique component of the Creighton program. Throughout the entire education program, the new teachers are taught to comprehensively approach the care of each client/couple. This allows for solutions to be provided to very complex problems which are sure to arise.

The single most important quality control item in a service delivery program is the evaluation of each pregnancy which occurs in the use of the natural method being taught. The "Creighton Model" is the only program of natural family planning in the United States which trains the teachers to conduct pregnancy evaluations. Thus, each teacher evaluates his or her own teaching service and gains insight into the methodology being taught. The use of pregnancy evaluation allows an understanding and resolution of pregnancies and it provides an important support mechanism under the teacher's care. Indeed, that support is provided through the course of the pregnancy as an important mechanism by which the client/couples re-enter the natural family planning program following the birth of a child.

If quality service is to be provided, then the maintenance of records is essential. Each teacher in the "Creighton Model" is taught how to maintain such records. Record-keeping of this type is critical to the standardization process and the education of new teachers. In addition, it allows clients to be transferred from one teacher to the next regardless of

the geographic location of that teacher. In our very mobile society, this is an important component of quality service delivery in natural family planning.

The Creighton-trained teacher also provides long term follow up to clients. Such long term follow up is essential to client support and eventually to the ongoing, *permanent* use of natural family planning. Such permanent use is a goal in teaching natural family planning and without such programs of long term follow up, this goal cannot be met.

The major contribution of the research being conducted at the Natural Family Planning Education and Research Center at Creighton University has been in the development of this model. It is the only model which combines the sound service principles of professionalism with the exciting principles of human reproduction found in Christian ethics. We would *invite* hospitals and dioceses to objectively evaluate all current natural family planning programs. We would ask that they specifically look at the *actual results* of current programs and to *compare available data* with regard to them. When such is accomplished, the professionalism of the "Creighton Model" will stand out and because of this, we look forward to a productive, long lasting relationship with these institutions.

The responsibilities that we have in the provision of quality natural family planning services is enormous! It cannot be taken lightly. Indeed, the potential that natural family planning has for the rejuvenation of the family is immense. The only limitation is our vision.

For further information with regard to the educational programs available in natural family planning at Creighton University please write or call: Thomas W. Hilgers, M.D., CNFPE, Director, Creighton University Natural Family Planning Education and Research Center, 601 N. 30th St., Omaha, NE 68131, 402-280-4430. In addition, a thirty minute *videotape* which provides an excellent view of the educational experience at Creighton University is also available (free of charge) by writing the above address.

LEGENDS

FIGURE 1: The Education, Service, Research Triangle which is essential to the support of the client couple in natural family planning.

FIGURE 2: The location of Creighton Model Natural Family Planning Education Programs, 1985.

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