

OB Health Coach tailors care to meet specific needs of expectant moms

From the moment women first learn they are pregnant, all the way through delivery and recovery, Megan Hemmelgarn feels honored to be a part of each mother's unique pregnancy journey. "The most rewarding part is the relationships I get to build with the mothers," says Hemmelgarn, RN, BSN and OB Health Coach at Perham Health.

"I truly enjoy getting to be a part of this journey with my patients. I love watching them progress from the first visit (which is often full of anxiety) to them coming in for a well child visit as confident mothers."

As a health coach with Perham Health's Obstetric Medical Home program, Hemmelgarn assists expectant mothers with

all aspects of pregnancy. This innovative program promotes a team-based approach to care, where patients are treated as the central member of their care team.

One of the women Hemmelgarn recently had the privilege of working with throughout her pregnancy is Alissa Lepp. When Lepp, who works as a sales coordinator with Kit Masters in Perham, learned she was pregnant she called Perham Health to set up her first prenatal appointment.

"We had a good experience last time when we had our daughter, Kennedy, at Perham Health two years ago," says Lepp. "The facilities are awesome and the birthing suites are really nice." After calling to schedule her prenatal appointment, Lepp was immediately connected with Hemmelgarn to help her prepare for her upcoming prenatal appointment.

"I am typically a woman's first contact during her pregnancy," Hemmelgarn explains. "When a woman calls to schedule a new OB visit, has any OB questions, or is wondering about a pregnancy test, our patient access team transfers the call to my office. I speak with the patient and her coordination of care starts at that point."

Megan Hemmelgarn will first meet with patients for a visit around the six to eight week point in their pregnancy. This visit will help prepare patients for what to expect when they meet with their physician for the first time between 10 and 12 weeks. Hemmelgarn then meets with expectant mothers again during the second trimester and throughout the third to help them prepare for upcoming visits, ultrasounds, and labs, as well as offering education and support.

"My goal is to provide them with a well-coordinated pregnancy so that the 'little



Al and Alissa Lepp are thankful for the two extremely positive experiences they've had at Perham Health where both their daughter, Kennedy, and newborn son, Jaxon, were born. With the addition of the OB Medical Home program, Alissa says her recent pregnancy went even smoother than her first.

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things' like appointments, scheduling ultrasounds, and getting signed up for classes don't have to be an added stressor for them," comments Hemmelgarn.

Lepp and her husband, Al, say having Hemmelgarn involved throughout the pregnancy was a huge benefit. When their daughter was delivered a few years ago, she was born shortly before the OB Medical Home program was rolled out at Perham Health. They both agreed that having an OB health coach available to answer questions and provide education throughout the pregnancy made the experience even more positive. "It seemed to go a lot smoother this time having Megan be a part of the process," says Al.

Alissa Lepp says she found it helpful to have someone to call if she had a question come up such as whether it was ok to take a certain medication while pregnant. At one point in her pregnancy, she started suffering from migraines, sought assistance, and found relief. Hemmelgarn also played an important role in December when Lepp learned her physician, Dr. Andrea Westby, was moving. Having Hemmelgarn present throughout the process resulted in a seamless transition of care to Dr. Kailey Witt.

"I think having one contact person patients can reach out to with any questions is great for the patients. They get to know Megan well and come to trust her," notes Dr. Witt.



Proud mother Alissa Lepp holds her newborn son, Jaxon. Lepp credits her positive pregnancy and postpartum experience to the support she received from Dr. Kailey Witt (left) and Megan Hemmelgarn, OB Health Coach (right). Perham Health's OB Medical Home program provides expectant mothers with the best possible pregnancy experience by offering a team-based approach to care that takes each mother's unique needs into consideration.

"Megan is also very familiar with our patients and OB care. She helps to guide patients through the whole experience. It is great to have a lot of the coordination done by Megan as far as scheduling appointments and arranging labs, ultrasounds, or other testing needed."

Lepp agrees, "We had one ultrasound where there was some concern about our baby's growth, so we ended up going to Fargo for an additional ultrasound. Megan coordinated this second ultrasound appointment for us and helped answer the questions we had. She and Dr. Witt got us in for an appointment right away the next morning and were able to talk with us about our concerns."

In addition to providing valuable education and support for

expectant mothers, having an OB health coach available is an asset to all other members in Perham Health's OB care team. Hemmelgarn works closely with providers and communicates with them frequently regarding patient needs and concerns. The entire Perham Health OB team includes Hemmelgarn, Dr. Jaimie Deraney, Dr. Illene Reed, and Dr. Kailey Witt. Dr. Vanessa Gil, Dr. Steven Murrell, and nurse midwife Tonya Diggins will be joining the team this fall.

Regarding the teamwork she witnessed with her care team, Alissa Lepp says she felt Hemmelgarn and Dr. Witt were in constant communication. "They both seemed equally informed about what was going on," she notes.

When it came time to deliver her baby, Lepp says she felt extremely prepared. Labor started at 3 a.m. on May 22. By 5 a.m. the couple knew it was time to head to the hospital. "I called ahead of time, so when we arrived the room was all ready for us. Every nurse we had was so friendly and helpful. I remember being sad every time there was a shift change because I really liked that nurse, but then the next nurse would be just as good!"



Megan Hemmelgarn, OB Health Coach at Perham Health, is available to answer questions and concerns women may have throughout pregnancy and the postpartum period. She believes open and frequent communication contributes to a healthy, stress-free pregnancy experience.

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Perham Health welcomes three new providers

To meet the growing need for obstetric care, Perham Health is adding three new OB providers to its qualified care team. Dr. Vanessa Gil, family medicine, started working in Perham this spring. In the fall, she will be joined by Dr. Steven Murrell, family medicine. A nurse midwife, Tonya Diggins, will join the Perham Health OB team late August and will be introduced at that time.

Dr. Vanessa Gil Family Medicine



Dr. Vanessa Gil first started working at Perham Health in April 2017. Originally from Winnipeg, Manitoba, she says she was drawn to the Perham area because of its proximity to home.

"It's such a quiet, pleasant area with very nice people," notes Dr. Gil.

She adds how she was also attracted to Perham Health because of the opportunity to practice obstetrics. "I enjoy caring for patients of all ages and watching them grow and develop (especially when that care begins as a child)," she says. "Obstetrics is particularly rewarding. I am honored and humbled when patients allow me to be part of such an exciting time in their lives."

Dr. Gil specializes in preventive care, women's health, and obstetrics. She received her medical degree from St. George's University, completing her residency at Aultman Hospital in Canton, Ohio.

She moved to the Perham area along with her husband Aries. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with family and her Boston Terrier, dance, puzzles, traveling, and learning about different cultures.

When asked about her philosophy of care, Dr. Gil responds that communication is key. "I very much believe in involving my patients in the medical decision-making process," she explains. "When patients take an active role and are committed to the improvement of their health, their outcomes improve. With time, trust between patient and provider develops and the overall experience of healthcare is more pleasant."

Dr. Steven Murrell Family Medicine



"I am a true generalist," says Dr. Steven Murrell. "I read medical literature very widely and my scope of practice is broad - treating patients in clinic and hospital settings, OB (including c-sections), inpatient and outpatient procedures, emergency medicine, palliative

care, and all ages - birth to death."

Dr. Murrell received his medical degree from Medical University of the Americas in Nevis, West Indies. He will be moving from Newberry, South Carolina, to the Perham area and hopes to start practicing medicine at Perham Health within the next few months. He mentions how he is specifically looking forward to practicing medicine in a rural setting.

"I view medicine as an extension of the healing ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ," he says of his philosophy of care. "I also find the relational aspect of family medicine very rewarding. I like patient and family interaction. Perhaps, because I was a nurse before I was a doctor, I also like collaboration with nurses and allied health practitioners."

Dr. Murrell and his wife, Starla have thirteen children—Elisabeth, Toga, Dana, Emily, Nicholas, Paul, Lucy, Nathaniel, Charlotte, Ava, Jackson, Kaitlynn, and Nina. He is also an Anglican bishop who has pastored in rural Southwestern Virginia, served as a diocesan bishop, taught church music and homiletics to seminarians, and served as a short-term missionary in Africa.

In his spare time, he enjoys playing the piano and singing. He also enjoys dairy goats and hopes to once again establish a herd now that he will be living in a more rural setting.

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Shortly after 1 p.m. that day, the Lepps welcomed their son, Jaxon, into the world. Baby Jaxon measured 20.5 inches long and weighed seven pounds, six ounces. "Jaxon's delivery went great," recalls Dr. Witt. "Alissa did amazing. It was a wonderful experience to be a part of."

Even after Jaxon was born, Hemmelgarn continued to stay in contact with Lepp to provide postpartum support. "If things are going well, I will typically end my involvement around six weeks postpartum," Hemmelgarn explains. "If things are not going well, I will follow the patient longer until her needs are resolved. That is one of the things about the program I love the most. We get to individually tailor the care moms receive to their specific needs."

"In my case, some of my main concerns revolved around the postpartum period," mentions Lepp. "Megan set me up with goals related to enjoying the postpartum experience more this time around. I am the type of person who gets concerned about bothering people, so it was really nice that she would call me to follow up with me. I knew she was a resource I could contact any time with any question related to the pregnancy or baby and she would get me the answer to my question."

Hemmelgarn encourages patients to contact her either through MyChart or via telephone. "I feel that consistent communication is essential to pregnancy care. Whether it is your first child or your ninth, each pregnancy can be very different. Each new pregnancy can come with a

different set of symptoms, questions, or experiences. I think it is very important to answer questions and provide support promptly to help alleviate any stress or anxiety."

"Megan was always there if I had any questions or concerns. She is a great listener and always seemed like she wanted to make sure I had the best experience possible," says Lepp. "I could tell she truly cared. She made sure I knew I could reach out to her for support at any time, for any reason. I felt like my experience was that much better this time having her in my corner for support. She will cry with you when you cry, laugh with you when you laugh, and give you a hug when you need it."



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Perham Health Scholarship Recipients

Perham Health is pleased to announce the recipients of its 2017 Healthcare Career Educational Scholarship. Each recipient will receive a \$1,000 scholarship to assist in pursuing a career in the health field. Congratulations to this year's recipients.



Brooklyn Koetke
Perham
High School

Brooklyn will attend Gustavus Adolphus to pursue a career as a registered nurse. Her parents are Joel and Teresa Koetke.



Abigail Sweere
Homeschool

Abigail plans to pursue psychology and occupational therapy at the University of Northwestern - St. Paul. Her parents are Paul and Penny Sweere.



Cody Lake
MState
Wadena

Cody is currently enrolled at MState Wadena in the registered nurse program. His parents are Darwin and Becky Lake.



Madison Peichel
Perham
High School

Madison will attend North Dakota State University in the registered nurse program. Her parents are Shawn and Sarah Peichel.



Leah Weber
North Dakota
State University

Leah attends North Dakota State University where she is enrolled in the registered nurse program. Her parents are Darren and Eileen Weber.



Ashley Schultz
University of
North Dakota

Ashley Schultz is the recipient of the Sanford Health Network Scholarship. Ashley is attending UND where she is enrolled in the physician's assistant program