Midwife led continuity models versus other models of care for childbearing women (2013)

Study design:
This Cochrane review of studies compared midwife led care to shared care and doctor (consultant) led care. It consisted of 13 trials, involving 16,242 women who were randomly assigned to midwife led care, shared care or doctor led care. Some studies only included women at low risk of complications in pregnancy and labour, and other studies included both women at low risk and women at high risk of complications in pregnancy and labour.

Results:
Midwife led care resulted in many benefits for the mother and baby. Women allocated to midwife-led care rather than to shared or medical led care were:
- less likely to have an instrumental birth
- less likely to have an epidural
- less likely to have an episiotomy (but no difference in the number of women having no perineal tears)
- less likely to have their waters broken to speed up the labour
- less likely to experience preterm birth (birth before 37 weeks)
- less likely to lose their baby before 24 weeks of pregnancy. However there was no difference in the number of women losing their baby after 24 weeks of pregnancy in women who received midwifery led care and those who received shared or medical led care.
- more likely to have a normal birth
- more likely to be cared for in labour by a midwife they knew
- more likely to experience a longer average length of labour
- more likely to report higher levels of maternal satisfaction

The review found no difference in caesarean birth rates.

The review also considered the cost of different types of care models and found that there seems to be a trend towards a cost saving effect of midwife led continuity of care in comparison with medical led care.
Conclusion:
Most women should be offered midwifery led models of care and women should be encouraged to ask for this option, although caution should be exercised in applying this advice to women with substantial medical or pregnancy complications.


The full review, as well as a 'plain English summary', are available from:
http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD004667.pub3/abstract;jsessionid=CB0FBB7C155348CE17035FBE214C35D2.d04t02