Christin Young

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School-based mental health counselor and mother of four children

"About four years ago, I worked for Catholic Charities of East Tennessee as a pregnancy services coordinator, where I provided education and resources to women in the community who were pregnant or postpartum. Right before I started my job, I found out I was pregnant myself, with my third child, and the hospital OB unit in Jellico closed down. I was set to deliver my baby there. I was 34 weeks pregnant. For me and for many other people, this (the closure) was a really big deal. It meant that we could get obstetrical care in our community, but there was nowhere to have a baby. The closest place to have a baby was The University of Tennessee Medical Center in Knoxville, which is an hour and fifteen minutes away from Jellico. Transportation was a huge issue for many people in the community.

I was scared I wasn't going to make it to the hospital in time. At the pregnancy center, we started seeing this trend of people going to the closest hospital to have their babies, which is in Corbin, Ky. So, Tennessee residents were crossing state lines to have babies. We were also told to stop at the hospital in La Follette (Tenn.) if baby was coming and we just had to get to a hospital. There's not an OB unit there, but there's a doctor there to catch your baby. But you're having your baby in an emergency department.

Women also have to have two OBs because transportation is such a huge issue here. We had to have one in Jellico and one in Knoxville. Most of the time, patients can go see their OB in town. Transportation issues are cut out, because you go see your doctor in town, and they relay the information to UT. But you do have to see the doctor at UT a certain number of times throughout your pregnancy. I had clients who were having to go to the OB twice in one week, because their appointments with their doctors in Knoxville and Jellico fell around the same time.

With my fourth baby, I chose to go to a completely different hospital in Knoxville, and just did everything there. It was a lot of extra travel. I already had three kids at home and I was working and going to school. As time-consuming as it all was, it was less time-consuming than having to see two sets of doctors."

Pregnancy is mentally stressful anyway, especially if it's an unplanned pregnancy. It seemed it was creating an increase in depression and anxiety (among pregnant women in Jellico) overall, because you are just flooded with things that you have to do. For some of them, there's not a lot of enjoyment that comes out of pregnancy. It's all about going to the doctor and scraping together gas money. It's a lot of added depression and anxiety, which carries over into your postpartum experience, too. And if you are diagnosed with clinical postpartum depression on top of that, that's a whole different bear that you have to battle.

I think people don't realize that driving to the doctor became a whole-day experience for pregnant women in Jellico. If you need a babysitter, that's also an issue. There was no real plan in place in case of emergencies, other than for patients to get to the closest locations they could to have their babies. At the pregnancy center, if they were enrolled in my program, there were videos that taught them what they needed to do if they had the baby at home or in the car.

But if you'd already had a child in Jellico, you were used to that hometown hospitality that comes with a smaller OB unit. Then, you had to go have a baby in a city in a hospital where you are not familiar with the people. That was another really big stressor.

If anything, we need to focus on the opioid epidemic, too. There are no inpatient treatment facilities for addiction that are specifically for women in Jellico. I would love to see one, but it is a huge undertaking. I know, because I'm getting my graduate degree in mental health, with a focus on maternal mental health.

It's affecting future generations. If we're having babies that are not coming into stable environments, with parents who are not getting the medical or mental healthcare they need, then that kid is not going to get the right start in life. That is detrimental to having a sound relationship with the community. It starts with these babies."