



Dad and I ease Mom into the tub, putting hot towels on her back. The water and ability to move more easily brings relief at first but I can see she's beginning to reach her limits. I speak gently to her and tell her it's OK to reach the end of what you can do.

5:30 P.M.: We plan to get out of the tub and I make sure Dad eats something. I'm vigilant about taking care of him and I'm not sure why. I dry Mom off and she makes her way back to the side of the bed. We sit on the ball and chair again and she leans on me. But she wants her husband, which is good. He sits down and they begin a similar ritual to the one they had this morning.

Her back is hurting again and I push against it with all my strength. I'm quite strong but I'm using all I have to counter the internal pressure from her uterus. This works for another half hour and then Mom has had enough. She hates herself for having limits and Dad and I try to help her to understand that this is a more difficult labor than she experienced with their first child. Mom decides to have an epidural, but first the doctor wants to perform another exam with Mom flat on her back. This is incredibly painful. Mom is at 7 centimeters and she

cries at what she sees as a lack of progress. Rather than trying to convince her she's fine, I let her get out her frustration.

7:00 P.M.: The anesthesiologist arrives and the epidural is administered. The pitocin has been lowered so Mom can rest. Dad gets something to eat and takes a nap. I take a break and talk with a nurse friend, which makes me feel a part of the community here. I love the feeling of belonging.

Finally, it occurs to me why I feel so overprotective of this dad. Two weeks ago I was alone for four hours with a father as he held his stillborn son. This man's wife had the support of their birth team. But he and I became a unit for that time and I took care of him. I tend to be acutely aware of the fathers' needs anyway; often, I think they get a raw deal. During labor, men are expected to see the person they love most in the world

in pain, deny their own feelings, and alleviate that pain after a few hours of instruction. Labor support is incredibly complex and dads without doulas frequently have feelings of ineffectiveness. Unless someone explicitly asks, most men keep these feelings hidden. But they're there.

8:30 P.M.: Mom's family has arrived with their 4-year-old granddaughter — the baby's big sister. They share hugs and jokes.

9:00 P.M.: The pitocin has been turned up and the strong contractions return. The epidural isn't giving as much relief as it usually

