

SHE'S A NEW MOM'S BEST FRIEND

Got a problem with post-partum depression? Breast-feeding? Child rearing? Her staff cares.

By **Steve Dorfman** - Palm Beach Post Staff Writer



Christine Englestad, Maternal Child Health Director of the Florida Department of Health Palm Beach County. Bruce R. Bennett / The Palm Beach Post

Posted: 5:04 p.m. Monday, April 24, 2017

Chris Englestad knew early on that she had a knack — and affinity — for taking care of others.

The fourth of seven children and the second of three daughters — “I was both middle child *and* middle sister” — Englestad, 65, recalled that, growing up in such a big family meant that there were always “younger siblings, cousins, nieces and nephews to look after.”

Turned out to be good training for what would eventually be her life’s work: maternity nursing.

Like so many women of her generation, the Camden, New Jersey, native was introduced to hospital care via volunteering as a candy striper.

“Nursing was the next logical step up.”

But *unlike* most registered nurses in the 1970s, Englestad earned her bachelor’s degree from the University of Maryland while attending school on a **Walter Reed scholarship**.

Thus, upon graduating (and getting married) in 1973, she “owed” the U.S. government a three-year stint as a nurse in a military hospital.

“I was stationed in San Antonio, Texas. I worked in a 16-bed oncology unit and learned so much. But that’s also when I knew for sure that I wanted to work in maternity.”

So that's what she did for a decade after fulfilling her military obligation.

Her transition into the public health sector came about, she said, because of her own children: "After my son and daughter were born, it became more difficult to work the kind of unpredictable shifts that maternity nurses sometimes have to work."

So, in 1986, she did the next best thing: join the Florida Department of Health Palm Beach County, where she's now division director for **Maternal Child Health**.

Supervising a staff of 64 — including more than 40 nurses — the West Palm Beach resident coordinates the division's three main programs:

- Healthy Beginnings Nurses
- Nurse Family Partnership
- Women's Health Initiative Florida

"The purpose of the Maternal Child Health division is to educate and support pregnant women and their infants, as well as the entire extended families."

With her cadre of registered nurse case managers making home visits (and doing follow-ups), Englestad said her division focuses on decreasing the incidence of pre-mature births, as well as the number of low birth-weight babies and the infant mortality rate.

"We try to give women all the tools they'll need — education, nutrition, counseling and other resources — to ensure they have a healthy pregnancy and give birth to a healthy baby. All of the services in our programs are backed by evidence-based studies that confirm their effectiveness."

These services include depression screening (with referrals to counseling services); infant/child developmental screening to identify developmental delays and refer for further assessments; child birth classes in multiple languages; breast-feeding education; immunization assessment and referral; parenting and family planning classes.

Englestad noted that, while a large segment of her clientele comes from underprivileged backgrounds, one doesn't have to be in financial need to take advantage of the division's programs.

"These days, especially in South Florida, we see far fewer nuclear, rooted family units like there were a generation or two ago," Englestad observed. "So, for pregnant women from all walks of life, we're here to be their support system if they need it."

That also helps explain why Englestad chose to join the public health sector more than three decades ago: "Instead of taking care of one patient at a time, now I get to think of the whole county as my 'patient.'"