

To the Senate Human Services Committee,

My name is Kayla Heger, I am a Board-Certified Women's Health Physical Therapist in West Fargo, ND. I have proposed a "Fourth Trimester Care Day" in North Dakota in hopes to increase awareness of the importance of postpartum care. So much of our current practice in health care is to provide focused care during pregnancy and delivery but we are falling short of providing the care needed to moms after delivery. Currently, a single follow-up visit is allowed six weeks postpartum with the patients OBGYN or primary care provider. The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology recommends a routine physical therapy consult 6 weeks post-partum, but unfortunately this is not yet the norm.

There is a significant amount of transformation and adaptation, particularly in the first three months of motherhood, all while experiencing physical, hormonal, and psychosocial changes in addition to caring for a newborn. This period of transition is considered the Fourth Trimester. Physical health issues during this Fourth Trimester often go undiagnosed and therefore, untreated. Some of the health issues mothers report experiencing include: pelvic and coccyx pain, urinary and fecal incontinence, diastasis recti, pelvic organ prolapse, scar tissue pain from either cesarean, episiotomy or natural tearing, hemorrhoids, pubic symphysis separation, painful intercourse, breastfeeding problems, physical exhaustion, depression, stress, and low back pain, just to name a few. These physical issues from childbirth in turn affect the mental health of new moms and their ability to provide care and nurture their babies. In addition to affecting full return to the workforce or previous activities and exercise.

For the sake of the health and well-being of both mother and infant, a mother should receive the physical, mental, social, and economic support she needs to successfully transition through this all-important, consequential Fourth Trimester period.

The ultimate goal of this proposal is to bring awareness and light to the significant amount of demands placed on moms in this transition back to life before pregnancy. Although focused care during pregnancy and delivery is crucial, it is only the tip of the iceberg in the scheme of things. The care provided to these patient's post-partum is critical to their return to previous activities, work, and overall quality of life. Not to mention a preventative measure to problems that may arise in the future if not addressed.

As a working mother in the field of women's health I am often working with moms struggling with symptoms and return to previous activities. Every woman deserves the social, emotional, physical, and economic support to successfully transition through the postpartum period. Help us move this conversation from "this is normal for a new mom" into the light. Let us provide a pathway and open opportunities to discuss prevention, education, and treatment options for moms in this fourth trimester period. Thank you for your time and consideration and hope you vote in favor of a "Fourth Trimester Care Day" in North Dakota. If you have any questions or would like more information or research to support the importance of this proposal, I would be happy to provide those for you.

