DONA International (1992– ) [1]

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DONA International was founded in 1992 by Klaus and Kennell as the Doulas of North America, later changed to DONA International in 2004. The organization aims to promote high quality birth and postpartum support for mothers and infants through evidence-based training and certification for doulas. DONA International is the largest doula-certifying organization in the world and has created global awareness of the risks and benefits associated with using a doula during the birthing process.

In 1992, five maternal-infant health researchers founded Doulas of North America, later renamed DONA International to train certified birth attendants called doulas to provide care to pregnant women both before and after the birthing process. Annie Kennedy, John Kennell, Marshall Klaus, Phyllis Klaus, and Penny Simkin used the term doula, derived from the Greek word for woman servant, to describe a female birthing aide who provides non-medical and physical support to laboring pregnant women. Eventually renamed DONA International, the organization has certified over 12,000 doulas as of 2017.

In 1992, Klaus and Kennell at DONA International changed as it became an international agency. The management and structure of the organization evolved to encompass state-level affiliations, with a state director for each state in the United States and national directors for countries outside of North America. There is also a board of directors that are voted into office every year by members of DONA International.

During the 2000s, DONA International continued to claim that doulas were beneficial to a pregnant woman’s birthing process. However, some women and medical professionals voiced concerns about a doula’s overall involvement in labor and delivery. In a 2006 study of women using doulas in Alabama, over 44 percent of women who recently gave birth indicated a hostile relationship between their doulas and hospital nurse. According to the New York Times article, “And the Doula Makes Four,” many physicians and nurses agree that doulas have created conflict between healthcare professionals and pregnant women, and as a result, some hospitals have prohibited the presence of doulas. According to the physicians interviewed in that article, they encountered doulas who overstepped their boundaries and advised pregnant women to go against medical advice. The physicians also found that some doulas encouraged their own opinions on whether women should use medication or receive a cesarean section during labor, even when those options were unlikely to cause harm to the pregnant women, according to the physicians. Because of those reasons, the physicians interviewed in that article advised women against using a doula.

Sources

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**Subject**
- Childbirth
- Obstetrics
- Natural Birth Association, Inc.
- Delivery (Obstetrics)
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- Childbirth at home
- Active childbirth
- Doulas
- Labor Coach
- Parturition
- Natural Childbirth
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