

ART IN MEDICINE

Full Moon

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Only eight babies in the last whole week, and now the moon's turned, we get that many in one night! And if you don't believe it," she added, "you can do your own study!" Labor and Delivery was buzzing with activity, and once again the nurses were talking of this full moon business.

I was raised and educated in rural Appalachia, and taught in one of the last old-time schools, so I was more than familiar with the folklore and superstitions of the mountain people. But now, as a junior medical student rotating through the OB service at the region's tertiary care hospital, I was not only surprised, but skeptical. An old wives' tale, I thought, and therefore of no consequence. What could lunar phases have to do with the onset of labor?

The other students, like me, had taken no heed of the nurses' comments about the moon. But having been challenged to test the validity of a hypothesis, our interest was piqued. A lunar cycle is twenty-eight days. So is a woman's. Mid-phase the moon is new. Mid-phase the woman ovulates. There was more similarity here than we had reckoned with! After some searching, a calendar with information on the phases of the moon was located and hung prominently in the on-call room. Over the next months we kept track of the deliveries, passing on the task to our fellow students as they rotated in and out again. Sure enough, the pattern was there, with a distinct cluster occurring shortly after each month's full moon.

A couple years later as an FP resident in upstate New York, I heard again of the full moon's effect on a full-term gravida and learned that the pattern has been recognized in many areas of the country. It is probably an observation as old as mankind, and one that has simply been forgotten of late among those too-civilized segments of our population, those out of touch with the Rhythm of Life....

"But why?" asks the intellect, the part of me that wants hard data for every observation. "Why not?" I can confidently reply, knowing that if the full moon can draw the waters of an entire ocean into the highest peak and lowest ebb, then surely it can exert a similar force on the amniotic waters of the womb, intensifying the pressures within, altering the hormones, affecting dilatation, effacement, station. So we can see that the Greater Power that guides and governs the celestial elements also directs and determines, often to a greater extent than we realize, the sequence and timing of events in our lives.

And now, almost ten years later and hundreds of miles from the hills of West Virginia, my wife, in the last uncomfortable weeks of pregnancy, asks me to look out the window as a perfectly full moon rises slowly above the trees. Only hours later she is laboring in earnest, and as the moon sets through the chill of a March dawn, we hold in our arms an equally perfect child, our third son.

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