Initiating a conversation with an obstetric patient to provide informed consent by explaining risks of an intended procedure or process is a health care challenge. To initiate that conversation when unanticipated adverse events occur is the nightmare feared by all health care providers.

Our role as obstetric care providers is to educate our patient and her family members so thoroughly about the care she is receiving and the risks or alternatives to that care that she becomes an equal participant in the final decisions regarding her body. Her family then becomes the knowledgeable support system for her selection of choices.

But what happens when an unanticipated adverse outcome occurs in obstetrics? Like leaves in a stream, the patient momentarily loses complete control over her life. She and her family are catapulted into a sea of grief, emptiness, confusion, indecision, and even anger. Her anchor in this emotional sea should be her care provider. For the care provider, however, thoughts such as, “Did I miss something?” or “Could I have done more to prevent this?” obscure what should be the intended role: to express compassion, educate, and provide continuity of care, even if the outcome was not expected.

The ideas in this book are not uniquely ours. They reflect the many conversations and counseling sessions that we have observed or in which we have participated. It is often said that one voice cannot make a difference. That is not so. Each patient and/or her partner have taught us something new as she or he has shared experiences. Collectively, these voices are a road map toward communicating with those who seek our care. Their stories and the coping skills that they bring to this process illustrate the strength of the human spirit.

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