PART IV:

EPILOGUE

Many aspects of the way health care providers deliver services to women in childbirth are tied to the economic realities of costs and revenues. Hospitals are updating their facilities to compete in the market for women's health care, but also face decreasing lengths of stay and insurance coverages. Single room maternity care is intended to answer both of these problems by decreasing hospital labor costs and increasing the appeal of the new facility design to expectant mothers and their doctors.

Those who advocate various methods of natural childbirth, midwifery and the use of free standing birth centers also are reacting to the limitation of funds for childbirth. Most proponents of free standing birth centers and a non-medical interventionist approach tout the reduced cost of giving birth in this type of facility. In this setting, often women are sent home from four to twelve hours after birth, with some type of nurse follow-up service.

Although experts in the field of childbirth indicate that it is usually safe to send women home four to twenty-four hours after birth, most agree that this situation is far from optimal. Reasons for this discontent range from concerns about newborn problems that often don't arise until the third day after birth, to too short of a recovery period for women going home to active household and childcare responsibilities.

The economic reality of competition in the health care industry has required designers of birth facilities to create environments for childbirth that encourage a comfortable, pleasant and supportive experience.
This research project and the resulting "Design Guidelines for Birthing Environments" is intended to offer birth facility planners and designers a source for research based design concepts and features. The ambulatory care center for birthing and women's health care is fast becoming a reality.

POSTPARTUM CONVALESCENT CENTER
Perhaps a new facility type is on the horizon. Women who need to extend their supported recovery period could do so in a facility designed for an extended postpartum stay. This facility for new mothers and babies may be considered as an adjunct to hospitals or birth centers. Designed for women who need a low level of medical care, the Postpartum Convalescent Center could provide flexible nursery care for newborns, prepared meals and housekeeping care for mothers, and nursing follow-up for mothers as it becomes necessary. This new facility type, with a low level of medical services and equipment, could offer mothers and hospitals a low cost flexible option for postpartum needs.