

Plan reduces number of Caesarean births

BOSTON (AP) — A hospital reduced its Caesarean births to half the national rate by requiring doctors to get second opinions and follow a few easy rules in a strategy that could save more than \$1 billion if applied everywhere, its developers said.

Caesarean sections are the most common form of surgery in the United States. Many medical experts agree that physicians perform far too many of them, but there is little consensus on how to cut back.

The program, started at Chicago's Mount Sinai Hospital Medical Center, lowered the Caesarean rate from 17.5 percent of births to 11.5 percent over two years. Nationwide last year, 24.4 percent of the 3.8 million births were Caesarean deliveries.

"We lowered it not from 24 to 17 percent, but from 17 to 11 percent, which is even harder to do," said Dr. Stephen A. Myers. "It's like going on a diet. The first five pounds are easy. The last five pounds are tough."

A report on the program, developed by Myers and Dr. Norbert Gleicher, was published in Thursday's New England Journal of Medicine.

The hospital set these rules:

- Except in emergencies, second opinions must be obtained before all Caesareans.

- Vaginal deliveries are preferred for all patients who have undergone previous Caesareans.

- Difficult birth is considered to be an acceptable reason for a Caesarean only if a woman fails to deliver after two hours of strong, regular uterine contractions.

- Fetal distress must be confirmed by a blood sample drawn from the fetus.

- Vaginal deliveries are recommended for nearly all breech births, those in which the baby appears bottom first.

A peer review process was set up to make sure that all doctors follow the rules. Those who seem to be performing too many Caesareans are notified, although no disciplinary action is taken.

The doctors estimated that if their program were adopted by other hospitals, the United States could avoid 450,000 Caesareans nationally. Hospitals charge about \$3,000 more for Caesareans than for vaginal births.

Mrs. Bush eases tension between rival first ladies

NEW YORK (AP) — Barbara Bush injected a bit of levity Wednesday into an exclusive U.N. luncheon for sometime-rivals Raisa Gorbachev and Nancy Reagan, putting the first ladies at ease in their final official meeting.

"It was very pleasant, very lovely, lots of smiling," said one of the luncheon guests in attendance — New York Post gossip columnist Aileen Mehle, better known as "Suzy."

Marcela Perez de Cuellar, the wife of the United Nations secretary-general, hosted the lunch at her posh East Side home for the first ladies, Mrs. Bush and 20 New York socialites, including cosmetics manufacturer Estee Lauder.

"I'm happy to be here in this city you call 'The Big Apple,'" Mrs. Gorbachev told reporters, saying the words the big apple in English. Aides to her husband, Soviet Presi-

dent Mikhail S. Gorbachev, had said he wanted to "take a bite out of the Big Apple" during his three-day stay here.

As photographers urged the first ladies, Mrs. Bush and Mrs. Perez de Cuellar to smile for pictures before lunch, Mrs. Gorbachev said, "We can't see you. That's why we don't smile."

"How do you say 'cheese' in Russian?" Mrs. Bush said as the four women posed.

Mrs. Bush, using her good humor, seemed intent on defusing any problems at the gathering between the two first ladies, who have had their run-ins on previous occasions in the past three years.

As the translator interpreted the word "cheese" for Mrs. Gorbachev and Mrs. Bush, the group broke out in smiles and laughter.

The first ladies and the 20 women

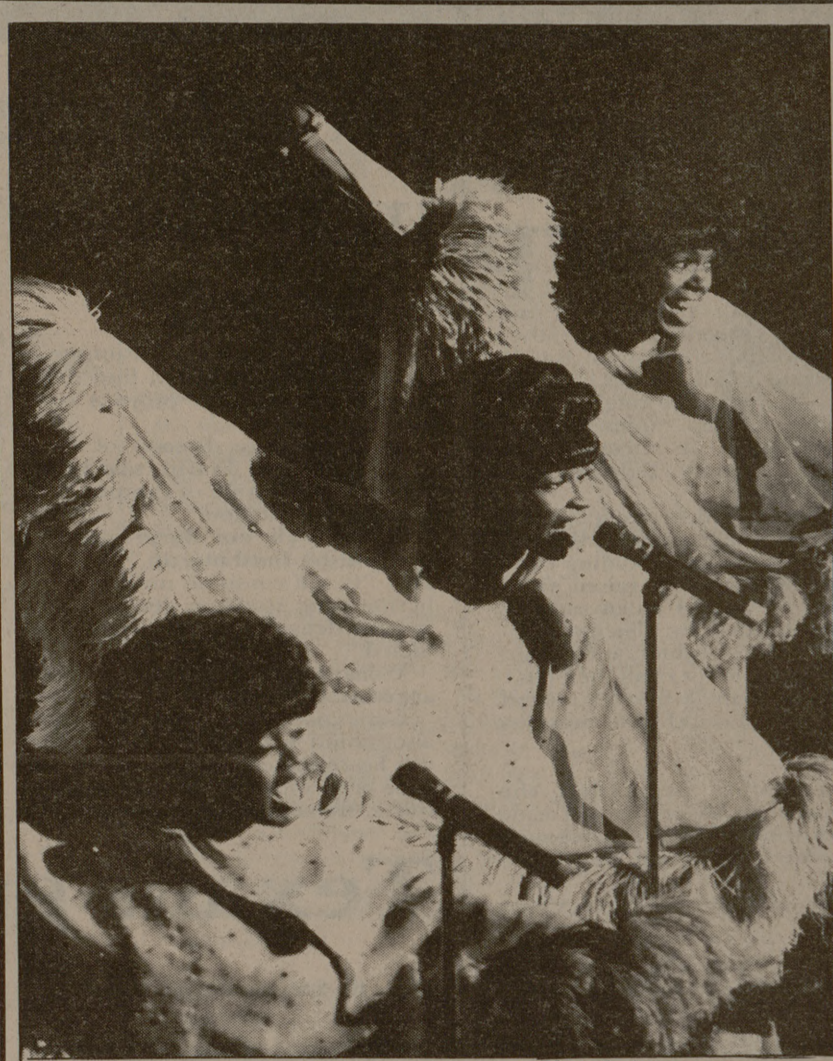


Photo by Phelan M. Ebenhack

Just a dream . . .

In this scene from Wednesday night's production of the musical "Dreamgirls," The Dreams, played by Lynette G. Dupre, Victoria Jones and Lyn MacDonald, sing to a Cleveland audience just before hitting it big and appearing on a television show. "Dreamgirls," performed in Rudder Auditorium, was sponsored by MSC OPAS, Columbia Artists Management, Inc., Guber/Grose Productions, Inc. and Candlelight Playhouse.

dined in an elegant room with a marble fireplace, crystal chandelier and tall windows overlooking the East River. Each place was set with crystal bearing the U.N. insignia and at every place setting lay a small present wrapped in a peach bow.

A table seat plan showed Mrs. Perez de Cuellar had put Mrs. Gorbachev on her right and Mrs. Reagan on her left. Mrs. Bush was seated next to Mrs. Gorbachev.

The two first ladies exchanged verbal invitations with Mrs. Gorbachev inviting the Reagans to the So-

viet Union and Mrs. Reagan asking the Soviet first couple to visit them in California after they leave the White House in January.

In the "very animated conversation," Mrs. Gorbachev discussed her husband's efforts to open Soviet society with his policy of glasnost and she added that they would like to see all nations opened, according to Ms. Mehle.

Mrs. Reagan responded that the United States was "indeed open," but the two women did not argue the point, Mehle said.



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