

Voices rise for painless childbirth

The suicide of a pregnant woman after her plea for a C-section was rejected has sparked a public outcry across China, with people calling for the promotion of pain-free delivery options.

Ma Rongrong, 26, who was a week from her due date, jumped from the fifth floor of an inpatient building at First Hospital of Yulin in Shaanxi province, because she was in unbearable pain and died on Thursday evening, according to a statement from the hospital.

The hospital and Yan Zhuangzhuang, Ma's husband, are now blaming each other for rejecting Ma's repeated pleas for a C-section instead of a natural birth after she was moved to a delivery room on Thursday.

Before Ma was admitted, she and her husband had insisted on a natural birth, the hospital said.

Li Ruiqin, Ma's doctor, was suspended after the woman's death and is cooperating with the police in their investigation, an unnamed official at the hospital was quoted as saying by ThePaper.cn on Tuesday.

On Wednesday, the incident became one of the hottest topics on Sina Weibo, with more than 56 million views.

A netizen who gave birth a month ago said in a comment that she, too, felt unbearable pain in the delivery room and asked for a pain-free vaginal delivery—with primary anesthesia delivered via the spinal cord—but was rejected by her doctor. She had to settle for an injection to stop the pain.

Song Xingrong, director of the anesthesia department at Guangzhou Women and Children's Medical Center, said natural childbirth may bring the most acute pain a Chinese woman will experience in life.

Most births in China are natural—with no pain intervention—or C-sections, which are generally painless because of techniques such as epidural and spinal anesthesia.

Pain-free vaginal deliveries, which may rely on a combination of spinal and local anesthesia, account for less than 5 percent of all deliveries in China. In Guangdong province they account for about 10 percent of deliveries, Song said.

Painless labor—a vaginal delivery aided by an epidural or spinal painkiller—is safe for both mother and child, he said.

“A major factor that discourages hospitals from providing painless labor is that it is not covered by basic medical insurance programs in China,” he said.

“Many people in China have not heard of painless vaginal labor because of

lack of promotion. Only 20 percent of pregnant women who come to our hospital are aware of it," he said.

In the United States, 85 percent of vaginal births are painfree, Song said. In Beijing, it's less than 30 percent, he said.

Yue Hongli, an anesthesiologist at Beijing Tiantan Hospital, said not all pregnant women are good candidates for pain-free labor, including those with serious lung or heart disease, or who cannot give birth naturally—in which case a C-section is required.