

17 July 2007

Diabetic mums-to-be receive improved care

Substantial improvements in pregnancy care and outcomes for women with diabetes have been achieved in the North East and Cumbria since the mid 1990s.

By the end of a nine-year period stillbirths and deaths of babies up to a week old – known as perinatal mortality - had halved.

And the proportion of live births increased by over 10 per cent, according to research published today (Jul 17) in the regional section of the Chief Medical Officer's annual report.

Pre-existing maternal diabetes substantially increases the risk of poor pregnancy outcomes, particularly perinatal mortality and congenital anomalies.

These risks can be reduced by interventions designed to improve an expectant mother's glucose control.

Dr Ruth Bell, Associate Director, Regional Maternity Survey Office, recently reported on trends over the duration of the clinical audit, which included all 13 maternity units in the region.

She said: "The health service in the North of England has achieved substantial improvements in pregnancy care for women with diabetes."

Between 1996 and 2004, 1258 pregnancies in women with diabetes were recorded.

By the last three years of the audit, the perinatal mortality rate had halved compared to the first three years.

The rate of miscarriages also fell at all gestational ages, resulting in an increase in the proportion of live births from 76% to 87%.

And there were substantial improvements in indicators of care before and during pregnancy.

These occurred despite a rise in the prevalence of women with pre-existing diabetes, almost entirely due to pregnancies in women with type 2 diabetes which is linked to increasing levels of obesity in the population.

more

Chief Medical Officer Sir Liam Donaldson calls for action in five key areas in his annual report for 2006, *On the State of Public Health*:

- improving levels of hand hygiene in hospitals (a key factor in infections such as MRSA) by giving patients the power to establish whether healthcare professionals have cleaned their hands and giving patients a personal supply of alcohol-based hand rub
- tackling the present crisis in organ shortages for transplantation by introduction of an opt-out system for donors, as is done successfully in some other countries
- reducing the risk of radiation overdoses during cancer treatment by extending the use of monitoring devices to all radiotherapy machines in the country
- conducting more research to establish the reasons why 500 babies die each year despite starting the process of birth apparently healthy ('intrapartum-related deaths')
- taking steps to increase the number of women in the most senior positions in medicine.

ends

Notes for editors:

A copy of the Chief Medical Officer's Annual Report 2006 *On the State of Public Health* can be downloaded from the Department of Health website, www.dh.gov.uk/cm0

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