



Embargoed until 00.01 UK time 15th Dec 2011

Women are dying because emergencies in pregnancy are not recognised, say leading experts in pre-eclampsia – make this stop in 2012

Shock figures show that over nine out of 10 women who died from pre-eclampsia received sub-standard care. The charity Action on Pre-eclampsia is setting a challenge – no deaths from pre-eclampsia in 2012.

- Pre-eclampsia is a common complication of pregnancy, affecting up to 30,000 pregnant women in the UK each year.
- It is a leading cause of maternal death, stillbirth and premature birth and leaves many women with severe long term health problems.

The latest UK CMACE report into deaths in pregnancy (cmace.org.uk) showed that that 9 out of 10 women who died owing to pre-eclampsia in the UK in recent years did not receive adequate medical care, making it the most neglected of all dangerous pregnancy problems.

Now, writing in *The Lancet Online First*, members of the PRECOG working group set up by the charity Action on Pre-Eclampsia (APEC) have called for immediate action to prevent unnecessary maternal deaths and protect women and babies from the potentially lethal effects of pre-eclampsia. (1)

They highlight errors in current practice by healthcare professionals.

- Pregnant women at risk are not seen often enough
- Basic signs and symptoms are missed completely or not recognised as significant.
- Where severe hypertension (high blood pressure) in pregnancy is spotted it is not treated as a life threatening situation even though it is a highly unpredictable condition which can progress swiftly.
- There is poor teamwork between midwives and GPs.

APEC believes that there is no excuse for such fundamental failures of care, and that all healthcare professionals must recognise pre-eclampsia as a medical emergency. To achieve this, it is proposed that death from pre-eclampsia should become a formal 'Never Event' (2) with the Department of Health – that is, never tolerated across the UK. **To this end APEC is sending a challenge – that 2012 becomes the first year when no woman dies due to substandard care of pre-eclampsia.**

Obstetrician and PRECOG member Professor Andrew Shennan of Kings College London comments: *"The data which drive quality in maternity care focus on service provision and the woman's experience. Whilst this is right, we need also to look at the outcomes of that care, We need to return to the basics: understanding what we are seeing, ensuring urgent referrals and involving senior staff straight away for example. Without this focus we will continue to fail women and their babies."*

Ends

References

1. Are most maternal deaths from pre-eclampsia avoidable?

Andrew H Shennan, Christopher Redman, Carol Cooper, Fiona Milne Maternal and Fetal Research Unit, St Thomas' Hospital, King's College London, London, SE1 7EH, UK (AHS); Nuffield Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK (CR); Department of Primary Care and Social Medicine, Imperial College School of Medicine, London, UK (CC); and Action on Pre-Eclampsia, Evesham, UK (FM)
andrew.shennan@kcl.ac.uk Lancet Online First, Dec 15th 2011

2. Department of Health. The "never events" list for 2011/12: policy framework for use in the NHS. Feb 24, 2011

Notes for editors

Pre-eclampsia is the second most common cause of death in pregnancy and responsible for 1000 fetal deaths a year. It causes a third of all serious obstetric morbidity and is the leading known cause of stillbirths. Pre-eclampsia is caused by a problem in the placenta and affects 1 in 10 pregnant women. The symptoms start any time from 20 weeks until after the baby is born and is defined as high blood pressure with protein in the urine.

- **Action on Pre-eclampsia (APEC)** is the only national charity dedicated to combating this devastating condition; it provides education for health professionals and support and information for pregnant women, those who have experienced pre-eclampsia, and their families. APEC will be campaigning during 2012 to make it a year with no deaths due to substandard care during pre-eclampsia. More details will follow early in 2012.
- **PRECOG** is a multidisciplinary expert group established by the charity Action on Pre-eclampsia that includes obstetric physicians, obstetricians, general practitioners, midwives and representatives of patients and key national bodies. They have produced published guidelines on screening and detection of pre-eclampsia in different settings, subsequently incorporated into the 2010 NICE guidance.

Contacts and case studies

- For more information and case studies of women affected by pre-eclampsia, please contact about Action on Pre-eclampsia on **01386 761848** or e-mail chief.executive@apec.org.uk
www.apec.org.uk

Further information

- **The pre-eclampsia community guideline (PRECOG): how to screen for and detect onset of pre-eclampsia in the community.**
Milne F *et al*. BMJ. 2005 Mar 12; 330(7491):576-80.
- **Assessing the onset of pre-eclampsia in the hospital day unit: summary of the pre-eclampsia guideline (PRECOG II).**
Milne F *et al*; PRECOG II Group. BMJ. 2009 Sep 9;339:b3129.
- **Management of hypertensive disorders during pregnancy: summary of NICE guidance.**
Visintin C *et al*; Guideline Development Group. BMJ. 2010 Aug 25;341:c2207
- **The management of hypertensive disorders during pregnancy**
NICE Clinical guidelines CG107, August 2010.
www.nice.org.uk/CG107