Stillbirth: Understanding and Management

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Stillbirth is one of the most common serious complications of pregnancy, affecting approximately 0.5% of pregnancies in the developed world and much greater proportions of pregnancies in the developing world. It is the endpoint of diverse processes, ranging from congenital abnormality, maternal medical disorders through to the significant proportion of cases where no clear cause is established. The subject, once neglected, is attracting an increasing focus with the growing acceptance that the annual worldwide loss of an estimated three million babies cannot continue to be ignored.

This multi-author volume of 136 pages addresses some of the most important areas around both clinical and research aspects of stillbirth, and is to be recommended as providing a good grounding in many of the key questions. The book is divided into four unequal sections headed 'Background', 'Clinical', 'Understanding Causes' and 'Management'. The focus of the book is stillbirth in the developed world. Issues around the developing world are touched on in some of the chapters. However, the obstacles to reducing rates of stillbirth in the developing world relate more to the difficulties in providing basic obstetric care. The focus of this book is more on understanding the stillbirths that occur in the presence of adequate obstetric care. There is a particularly detailed chapter of

almost 20 pages addressing maternal medical disorders and the risk of stillbirth.

If the book has a weakness, it is perhaps that it reads more as a series of reviews rather than as a single piece of work. Consequently, there is perhaps a lack of an obvious linear path in the themes. Prediction and prevention of recurrent stillbirth is dealt with in great detail in Chapter 5, but appears again in the final chapter with another and rather different table of possible preventive measures. Overlap exists in some other aspects: the risk factor of maternal obesity is discussed in the consecutive chapters addressing 'Lifestyle-related risk factors' and 'Maternal disorders'. Similarly, preeclampsia is discussed in the latter chapter and again under 'Obstetric conditions'.

There are one or two omissions. One of the categories of stillbirth which is potentially most readily preventable, is intrapartum stillbirth of normally formed infants at term. This outcome is not completely discussed in the chapter on obstetric conditions and hence important causes such as malpresentation, uterine rupture and other losses at term are not addressed. Also missing, to a degree, is a strategy for how future research might best be planned to facilitate the development of novel methods of screening and intervention to prevent stillbirths in the future. Nevertheless, this is an extremely valuable book which presents a broad range of well-presented information on a neglected subject. It is strongly recommended to anyone with an interest in perinatal mortality.

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