

THE ROLE OF A CONSULTANT OBSTETRIC PHYSICIAN

Obstetric physicians care for women with medical problems in pregnancy. Medical problems may predate the pregnancy or develop for the first time in pregnancy. Some are common and some are dangerous. Most medical disorders have the potential to affect the unborn baby commonly because the woman may need early delivery of a premature baby or because of the medicines used to treat the medical condition.

Examples of medical conditions that are commonly encountered in pregnancy because they are quite common in women of child bearing age include:

Asthma, Epilepsy, High blood pressure, Diabetes, Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE)

Some medical conditions occur more commonly in pregnancy such as
Thrombosis, Urine infections

Some medical conditions only occur in pregnancy such as

Pre-eclampsia (Action on Pre-eclampsia; APEC www.apec.org.uk; helpline 020 8427 4217)

Obstetric cholestasis (www.britishlivertrust.org.uk; support group 0121 353 0699)

Gestational Diabetes

Acute fatty liver of pregnancy

There are only 5 Obstetric physicians in the UK and we need more. These doctors work very closely with other medical specialists, GPs, midwives and obstetricians to provide multidisciplinary care for women with medical problems. Obstetric physicians offer specialised counselling to women who have various medical conditions, some of which are listed above. Ideally this should take place before the woman becomes pregnant so that she enters pregnancy fully informed of all the issues and any risks to her or her baby. Many women have concerns about taking medicines while they are pregnant and yet many medicines are safe and it is important that women know to continue these in pregnancy. Other medicines need changing before or during pregnancy.

For some of the rare conditions that only affect pregnant women, obstetric physicians are likely to have more experience in caring for such women than general obstetricians. Some women with medical problems affecting for example their kidneys or their heart have very high risk pregnancies and need to be seen and monitored very frequently during pregnancy.

There is much that needs to be done to improve care for women with medical problems in pregnancy and to ensure that more doctors are trained to manage such women. The Lauren Page Trust exists to support the work of Obstetric Physicians and has already funded the purchase of blood pressure machines, machines to monitor the unborn baby's heart rate as well as some specific multicentre research on Obstetric cholestasis.

