



Striving to safely lower early birth rates

For most women and their families, pregnancy is one of life's most exciting and rewarding moments. Nine months is followed by the birth of a healthy child full of potential. But not all are so fortunate.

In Western Australia, one in 12 pregnancies ends too early, often causing significant problems for the child. In many cases the problems may be lifelong.

After several decades of targeted research conducted by ourselves here in Perth and our colleagues elsewhere, we now have the knowledge to prevent a meaningful proportion of these births ending too early.

The challenge, however, is working out how to apply our new discoveries into health care at a population level.

WA has 33,000 births each year, spread across a wide geographical area and with many different models of health care.

But we have some great strengths enabling us to be world leaders in this field. The isolation of our State presents many challenges but can also be used to great advantage in some areas of medicine and this is one of them.

As a medical community we are functionally an island, empowered by our relatively well-educated and well-resourced community, with excellent computerisation of data describing health outcomes.

This combination of attributes gives us a natural competitive advantage in translating research discoveries into clinical practice.

In November 2014 we launched the Western Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Initiative.

This unique statewide program aims to safely lower the rate of early birth, saving lives and preventing lifelong disability.

The world is watching the progress of this unique program. The Initiative has been built on the development of new clinical guidelines to be available for all health care professionals and pregnant women in our State.

There are three major components. First is a statewide outreach program ensuring that all health care providers who care for pregnant women are up-to-date with the new clinical strategies. Second is an online public health program.

Third is a dedicated preterm birth prevention clinic based at King Edward Memorial Hospital providing management plans for those pregnant women at highest risk.

In this magazine you will find short articles written by some of our key health care professionals who contribute to this field.

For pregnant women and their families, we hope you find this information to be of value and help you enjoy your pregnancy.



Professor John Newnham

Further information can be found at www.thewholeninemonths.com.au.

Many individuals and organisations are contributing to the success of this Initiative.

I would like to acknowledge and thank each and every health care practitioner and researcher who is involved, together with the organisations that are contributing financially. Details of these organisations can be seen later in the magazine.

Preventing preterm birth whenever possible is now a major priority. The new clinical guidelines and education programs are clearly changing clinical practice and the early signs suggest the Initiative is proving to be successful.

But we cannot do this alone. Improving the lives of the next generation of Western Australians by ensuring they can benefit from the full nine months of development before birth requires a combined effort from the women and families of our State, in partnership with our health care workforce.

This magazine contains some of the information that will help this partnership to be successful.

Professor John Newnham AM

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