

High-dose Progesterone Treatment Reduces Preterm Delivery Risk

March of Dimes Award Recognizes New Research

SAN FRANCISCO, CA -- February 8, 2007 -- Researchers at the 27th Annual Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine (SMFM) meeting announced today that high-dose progesterone treatment helped at-risk pregnant women avoid premature delivery.

A preterm birth can have serious consequences to the baby, including cerebral palsy, mental retardation, lung disease, blindness and hearing loss.

In this study, 45 women who experienced premature labor (before 37 weeks gestation) were randomly divided into treatment and observation groups. The treatment group received twice-weekly 341-mg doses of progesterone until week 36. The injections appeared to prevent continued shortening of the cervix, a factor in premature labor.

"Our purpose was to determine if a higher dose of alpha-hydroxy- progesterone caproate (17P), commonly used to prevent preterm birth among women with that history, can affect cervical changes and increase preventive effectiveness in women during their first pregnancy," said Fabio Facchinetti, MD, of the Universita di Modena e Reggio Emilia (Modena, Italy,) lead study author and SMFM member. "Our finding was that 22% of the women in the treatment group had a preterm delivery, compared to 54% in the observation group. We believe this was the result of reduced cervical shortening and inhibited local inflammation." In an unrelated study, similar 17P treatments reduced the risk of preterm delivery by 85%, he said.

"Dr. Facchinetti's research is critical to identifying another tool for helping pregnancies go as close to full-term as possible," said Diane Ashton, M.D., MPH, March of Dimes deputy medical director. "It appears this comparatively simple treatment can help prevent premature birth, which can have devastating effects on a baby."

The study, Alpha Hydroxy-Progesterone Caproate (17P) Treatment Reduces Cervical Shortening Inhibiting Cervical Interleukin-1 Secretion, is the first to address the relationship between progesterone, cervical changes, and preterm deliveries. It is the fourth by SMFM members honored by the March of Dimes for honing the tools in the fight against prematurity.

SOURCE: March of Dimes