



13 November, 2009

Statement of principle

For the majority of women, pregnancy and childbirth, particularly those in adequately resourced settings, is a normal happy event resulting in the birth of a healthy baby. While stillbirth is a rare event in such settings (less than 1% of all births), it is one of the most traumatic experiences an adult can experience and is associated with long lasting psychosocial effects.

The aim of antenatal surveillance is to identify women at increased risk of stillbirth and other complications thereby enabling appropriate intervention to improve outcome. Pregnant women with risk factors, particularly those having had a previous stillborn baby, suffering anxiety need compassionate reassurance and closer monitoring.

There is no evidence to indicate that home fetal heart monitoring devices have a role as a surveillance tool to improve pregnancy outcome. Such monitoring may actually increase the risk due to false reassurance and delayed access to appropriate care.

ANZSA Position

A recent report published in the BMJ¹ and accompanying editorial² and media coverage has highlighted the risks of fetal home monitoring.

ANZSA strongly supports care providers advising women against home self-monitoring using fetal heart monitoring devices.

Pregnant women who are concerned about their baby's health, such as a decrease in movements, should seek advice from their health care provider and not rely on the use of fetal heart monitors used at home.

Women who are anxious about the risk of stillbirth, neonatal death or other adverse outcomes should be carefully assessed and appropriate clinical and psychosocial care provided.

References

1 Chakladar A, Adams H. Dangers of listening to the fetal heart at home. BMJ. 2009; 339: b4308.