Press Release

IMA: All the pregnant women watch out for HELLP syndrome

Immediate medical assistance is required if a pregnant woman experiences blurred vision, high blood pressure, shortness of breath, severe headaches or right side abdominal pain

New Delhi, March 31, 2017: The HELLP syndrome, which stands for - hemolysis, elevated liver enzymes and low platelet count is a life-threatening disease that develops in 10% to 20% of women during pregnancy. The syndrome is found to occur in women with severe preeclampsia and gestational hypertension. The common signs and symptoms of HELLP Syndrome include severe headaches, indigestion, nausea, pain after eating a meal, chest/abdominal tenderness, vision change, shoulder pain, swelling and upper right upper side pain. The diagnosis of HELLP syndrome includes a series of blood tests, liver function test, blood pressure test, and urine tests to check the presence of protein.

The global mortality rate of HELLP syndrome has been reported to be as high as 25%. It is critical for expecting mothers to be aware of the condition and its symptoms so they can receive early diagnosis and treatment.

Padma Shri Awardee Dr K K Aggarwal, National President, Indian Medical Association (IMA) and President Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and Dr. RN Tandon – Honorary Secretary General IMA in a joint statement said that “The HELLP syndrome occurs either at later stages of pregnancy or soon after the childbirth. Pulmonary edema, detachment of the placenta from the uterus, liver failure, clotting, hemorrhage and maternal and fetal lung failure are some of the complications found associated with the HELLP syndrome. Factors like a history of poor pregnancy outcomes, multiple pregnancies and maternal age > 25 years increase the likelihood of women developing HELLP syndrome during pregnancy. All pregnant women are advised to immediately consult their doctor if they experience any of the symptoms mentioned above or if their lab report indicates elevated liver enzymes, low red blood cell, and a low platelet count.”

“HELLP syndrome can be difficult to diagnose, especially when high blood pressure and protein in the urine aren’t present. Given that it’s symptoms are sometimes mistaken for gastritis, flu, acute hepatitis, gall bladder disease, or other conditions it is important to consult your doctor if you are under going any unexplained discomfort during pregnancy,” added Dr K K Aggarwal.
Most often, the definitive treatment for women with HELLP Syndrome is the delivery of their baby. During pregnancy, many women suffering from HELLP syndrome require a transfusion of some form of blood product (red cells, platelets, plasma). Corticosteroids can be used in early pregnancy to help the baby's lungs mature. In some certain steroids may also be used in the management of the condition.

Babies born to mothers with HELLP syndrome weighing over 2 pounds have the same survival rate as babies born to mothers without. Most cases of child deaths due to HELLP syndrome can be attributed to abruption of the placenta (placenta prematurely separating from the uterus), placental failure with intrauterine asphyxia (fetus not getting enough oxygen), and extreme prematurity making timely intervention and prevention crucial.

Preventive tips

- Get yourself in the good physical shape before getting pregnant
- Have regular prenatal visits during pregnancy
- Inform your care providers about any previous high-risk pregnancies or family history of HELLP syndrome, preeclampsia, or other hypertensive disorders
- Understand the warning signs and report them to your healthcare provider immediately
- Trust yourself when "something just doesn't feel right"
- Never ignore any kind of discomfort, especially after 20 weeks of pregnancy
- Never self-medicate during pregnancy

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About IMA: Indian Medical Association is the only representative, national voluntary organization of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine, which looks after the interest of doctors as well as the well being of the community at large. It has its Headquarter in Delhi and State / Terr. Branches in 30 States and Union Territories. It has over 2, 60,000 doctors as its members through more than 1765 active local branches spread across the country.

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