WHO new recommendations for antenatal care: increase the number of antenatal visits

WHO has issued a new series of 49 recommendations to improve the quality of antenatal care to reduce the risk of stillbirths and pregnancy complications and give women a positive pregnancy experience.

New Delhi, Nov 9, 2016: The new antenatal care model proposed by the WHO aims to increase the contacts between a pregnant mother and healthcare providers. This is especially important considering the global deficit of antenatal care, particularly in developing countries.

Last year 2.6 million stillbirths were recorded. It is estimated that 66% of stillbirths globally occur in 10 countries in which India occupies the top slot with 5,92,000 still births in 2015. The alarming data reflects the poor antenatal care scenario in India.

Padma Shri Awardee Dr. KK Aggarwal - President HCFI and National President Elect IMA added, “India has poor coverage of antenatal care, on average it ranges around 50% or even less in rural areas. To improve antenatal health in terms of reducing the number of still births, tackling the issue of low birth weight and premature birth rates; antenatal care coverage has to increase nationwide. Antenatal care become all the more important in cases where the mother has morbid conditions like diabetes, heart disease, obesity or preeclampsia (high blood pressure) which are prevalent conditions in India.”

The new recommendations advise that pregnant women increase their antenatal visits from four to eight (minimum) starting in the first 12 weeks of gestation, with subsequent contacts taking place at 20, 26, 30, 34, 36, 38 and 40 weeks’ gestation.

“The idea behind the model is to improve adoption of preventive measures, timely detection of risks and complications leading to reduced maternal and perinatal mortality. It is important not only to increase antenatal care services but to also raise awareness about maternal and fetal health. The model is also proposed to include counseling on important issues like healthy diet, physical activity, optimal nutrition, prevention of Malaria and HIV and substance use. Moreover, women should be informed about fetal care procedures during the course of pregnancy including fetal measurements using ultrasound, neonatal nutrition and lactation”, added Dr. K.K Aggarwal.

Other key recommendations include:

- Counselling about healthy eating and keeping physically active during pregnancy.
• Daily oral iron and folic acid supplementation with 30 mg to 60 mg of elemental iron and 400 µg (0.4 mg) folic acid to prevent maternal anaemia, puerperal sepsis, low birth weight, and preterm birth.

• Tetanus toxoid vaccination for all pregnant women, depending on previous tetanus vaccination exposure, to prevent neonatal mortality from tetanus.

• One early ultrasound scan before 24 weeks of gestation for pregnant women to estimate gestational age, improve detection of fetal anomalies/multiple pregnancies and reduce induction of premature labour.

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About Heart Care Foundation of India
Initiated in 1986, the Heart Care Foundation of India is a leading National NGO working in the field of creating mass health awareness among people from all walks of life and providing solutions for India’s everyday healthcare needs. The NGO uses consumer-based entertainment modules to impart health education and increase awareness amongst people. A leading example of this is the Perfect Health Mela; an annual event started in 1993 that is attended by over 2-3 lakh people each year. The Mela showcases activities across categories such as health education seminars and check-ups, entertainment programs, lifestyle exhibitions, lectures, workshops, and competitions. In addition to this, the NGO conducts programs and camps to train people on the technique of hands only CPR through its CPR 10 mantra for revival after a sudden cardiac arrest. They currently hold three Limca book of world records for the maximum number of people trained in hands-only CPR in one go. Keeping article 21 of the Indian Constitution in mind, which guarantees a person Right to Life, Heart Care Foundation of India has also recently initiated a project called the Sameer Malik Heart Care Foundation Fund to ensure that no one dies of a heart disease just because they cannot afford treatment.

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