



Media Release

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Giving Children the Chance of a Lifetime – Children’s Week 2006

Leading Australian obstetricians, neonatologists and infant health researchers from the Perinatal Society of Australia and New Zealand (PSANZ) and parents are calling on State and Federal Governments to recognise that all children need the chance of a lifetime.

Professor Jeffrey Robinson, head of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the University of Adelaide said, “2,000 babies are stillborn every year in Australia and in approximately one third of these deaths the cause is unknown. Most of the unexplained deaths occur at late term gestation often after a normal, healthy and uneventful pregnancy”.

“While research is urgently needed to find out more about why these babies die, we do know that some factors increase a woman’s risk of stillbirth. Unfortunately, many women and health care professionals are not sufficiently aware of these risks” said Professor Robinson.

Emma Kirkwood, founder of the Stillbirth Foundation had a baby die at term in 2002. “Our family was absolutely devastated. Olivia was a beautiful perfectly formed little girl and we have never been given an explanation for her death.”

While the neonatal and infant mortality rates have declined in Australia over the past two decades, the rate of stillborn babies has not. The numbers of unexplained stillbirths in Australia have increased over the last two years and are now 10 times that of SIDS deaths.

“Stillbirth is a major public health issue yet it receives little social, political or research focus”, said Professor Robinson “Until we acknowledge the devastation that a stillbirth causes a family nothing will be done to address the high rates of stillbirth in Australia”.

“There is a deafening silence following the delivery of a stillborn baby, it’s as if it is a taboo subject, but for the parents, the baby is just as much a loved member of their family as any of their other children”, said Mrs Kirkwood “There was so little information given to me when Olivia died and so little understanding of the overwhelming grief I was feeling”.

Vicki Flenady, Coordinator of PSANZ Perinatal Mortality Group is calling on government support to improve the quality of investigation, audit and classification of stillbirths to reduce the numbers of stillborn babies in Australia. “We believe that every baby in utero should be given the chance of a lifetime”, said Ms Flenady.

Media Enquiries

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