

Online tool to improve perineal repair

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Scientists at the Universities of Birmingham and Staffordshire have jointly led the development of an online training package to assist midwives and obstetricians to carry out medical procedures to help women who have sustained a perineal injury during childbirth.

The *MaternityPEARLS* (*Maternity* Perineal Assessment and Repair eLearning System) self-directed learning kit has been adopted by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) to help to reduce the pain and side effects associated with perineal injury.

Perineal injury affects around 85 per cent of women who give birth vaginally. Each year around 400,000 women in the UK require suturing and, depending on the extent of the injury, sometimes prolonged follow-up treatment and, in severe cases, corrective surgery.

The development of the e-learning training package was funded by a Shine award from the Health Foundation and was produced as a result of the PEARLS clinical trial. This was the first study of its kind to assess the impact of a 'hands on' training package for perineal trauma. It was designed to enhance the knowledge and practical skills of midwives and obstetricians in the assessment and management of perineal trauma repair, improve implementation of evidence into practice and women-reported outcomes whilst saving money.

Khaled Ismail (<http://www.bhamivf.org.uk/professionals/r-and-d-newpage/r-and-d-newpage-28.htm>), Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the University of Birmingham and Birmingham Women's Hospital, who jointly led the research with Professor Christine Kettle (Professor of Women's Health, Staffordshire University), comments: 'It is great news that *MaternityPEARLS* is now available through the RCOG for global access as part of core training. The training package is also available for any hospital or higher education institution to access for a small fee, in line with other RCOG e-learning modules.

'With this level of global access we will ensure that *MaternityPEARLS* achieves its full potential as a multi-professional distance learning tool for perineal trauma repair. We would like to thank the Health Foundation for their continued support to quality improvement in general and in relation to women's health in particular.'

Jo Bibby, Director of Strategy at the Health Foundation, adds: 'I am delighted that the *MaternityPEARLS* project has been successful in launching and embedding their e-learning training package for perineal trauma.

'This project was one of 18 that was chosen to be part of the first round of our Shine programme; the innovative idea showed that it had the potential to improve quality and reduce costs. It is wonderful to see that after testing this idea and showing evidence that it works the project has now been adopted by leading healthcare organisations. I am positive that over time this very important training package will gather more support and continue to improve the quality of care in maternity units around the UK.'

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PEARLS: Perineal Assessment and Repair Longitudinal Study: A National Clinical Quality Improvement Project. KM Ismail (University of Birmingham), C Kettle (Staffordshire University), S Macdonald (Royal College of Midwives), PW Thomas (Bournemouth University), D Bick (King's College London).

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