

Taking ultrasound into the community

Exeter midwives trial pocket ultrasound for obstetric suitability outside of the hospital

A pilot study involving eight community midwives from Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust suggests that portable ultrasound has the potential to reduce hospital admissions for presentation scans. This would eliminate the need for patients in remote areas to travel to appointments and encourage more home births.

Myles Taylor, Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist and Tom Smith-Walker, Obstetric Specialist Registrar at Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust, carried out a pilot study to investigate the feasibility of using a portable ultrasound device in community midwifery practice. The device was used by eight midwives in Exeter for one month, scanning expectant mothers in the third trimester. Initial feedback from a user questionnaire highlighted the system's ease-of-use and with further exploration, full confidence in its capability to reduce hospital referrals.

An ACUSON P10™ handheld ultrasound system from Siemens Healthcare was used during the trial. It is small enough to fit into a coat pocket, weighing just 700 grammes and capable of image depth from four to 24 cm. Its mobility enables examinations to take place out of the hospital environment with ultrasound imaging taken directly to the patient.

“In our fetomaternal assessment unit an average of 30 patients per month are referred for presentation scans,” said Tom Smith-Walker, Obstetric Specialist Registrar at Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust and co-author of the study. “Feedback from the midwives using the P10 suggests that it certainly has the potential to reduce such visits through use in rural locations with scattered communities.”

“This initial trial suggests the versatility and confidence that portable ultrasound can deliver outside of the traditional hospital environment. The portability of imaging devices will assist midwifery and medical professionals in their day-to-day roles,” said Declan Dunphy, Ultrasound Product Manager at Siemens Healthcare. “With pressure on hospitals to increase efficiency, it is encouraging to hear positive feedback on the P10 ultrasound system’s potential to eliminate the need for patients to travel to hospital for repeat scans. We are delighted that it has assisted community midwives in delivering diagnostic confidence.”

Initial findings were presented at the British Maternal and Fetal Medicine Society (BMFMS) Annual Congress from 10 – 11 June 2010 in Gateshead. The authors recommended a larger and more detailed study is carried out to provide further confirmation on the effect the P10’s use would have on reducing hospital referrals and the incidence of undiagnosed breeches at term.

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Approximately 413 words

14 July 2010

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Picture caption: A pilot study involving eight community midwives from Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust suggests that the ACUSON P10™ handheld ultrasound system from Siemens Healthcare has the potential to reduce hospital admissions for presentation scans.



Picture caption: Pam Conaghy, Midwife at Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust, using the ACUSON P10™ handheld ultrasound system from Siemens Healthcare to scan a patient.

