

MEDIA RELEASE

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and New Zealand
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and Gynaecologists

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College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists Strongly Supports Study on Private Maternity Care

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG) has today welcomed a study of almost 800 000 recent births in Australia, the first large study that has looked at the health of mothers and babies during birth and compared the outcome of births managed directly by specialist obstetricians in private hospitals, to those conducted in public hospitals.

‘These are significant findings which have come out of the study that should give women confidence in obstetric care. There are opportunities now for the public sector to learn from the private sector to try to improve further Australia’s already world class birth outcomes, said RANZCOG President, Dr Ted Weaver.

‘Obstetrician-led care appears to confer significant benefit to a mother and her baby with the study showing that the risks of a term baby dying or being severely ill at the time of birth are HALVED, when a term baby is delivered under the care of a specialist obstetrician, compared with the other models of maternity care.

‘We acknowledge the rates of various interventions, such as caesarean section, are higher with obstetrician-led care, but this brings benefits. There is an orthodoxy promoted in the community that high intervention rates are possibly harmful for mothers, yet this study suggests they may confer benefit. It is not surprising that when the most highly-trained and experienced person manages a woman in labour, the outcomes are the best.

‘This study also addresses the importance of team work. We need doctors at the helm supervising, teaching and working collaboratively with midwives, who are an integral part of the multidisciplinary team involved in caring for women having babies.

‘Private obstetrics is obstetrician-led, but it is crucially underpinned by a well-working, well trained team, that regularly reviews outcomes of care. The College supports the important conclusion reached in the study, that when a labour and birth are managed by a specialist obstetrician, there are markedly improved outcomes for mother and baby.

‘Women and their families should demand that obstetricians have a pivotal role in maternity care in this country, across all models of care. The College supports further research in this area, to identify areas where improvements can be made in maternity care to ensure best possible pregnancy outcomes for all Australian women and their families,’ said Dr Weaver.

About the study:

- A research team led by Associate Professor Steve Robson, from the Australian National University, compared births managed directly by specialist obstetricians in private hospitals, and compared them to those conducted in public hospitals (where babies are delivered by midwives, trainees, with indirect oversight by specialist obstetricians).
- It found that women who had their babies in public hospitals had more than twice the risk of a serious pelvic floor injury.
- It also found that babies delivered by specialist obstetricians in private hospitals had a risk of dying or being seriously ill at birth that was half that of babies born in public hospitals.

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