

EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES FOR STAFF IN CASES OF STILLBIRTH

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Keywords. Stillbirth, staff, emotions, stress.

Introduction. Stillbirth is an adverse pregnancy outcome, which is defined by fetal death after the 20th week of gestation. Worldwide about 2.7 million babies were stillborn in 2015; in Latvia there were 106 cases of stillbirth in 2015. In most cases stillbirth comes unexpected and unpredictable but it leaves a deep impact on the parents and staff. Providing care for bereaved parents, openly communicating and supporting them is crucial, but also can be emotionally draining for staff.

Aim. To determine emotional challenges for staff working with patients in cases of stillbirth.

Materials and methods. Research was done by surveying health care professionals working in Maternity wards – midwives and obstetricians in 2 hospitals – *Rīga Maternity Hospital* and *Pauls Stradiņš Clinical University Hospital Perinatal Care Center*. The survey consisted of various questions about the challenges of working with patients in case of stillbirth. 106 respondents completed the survey. Statistical analysis was done in IBM SPSS Statistics v23.

Results. 103 of the respondents were women. 66% (n = 70) were midwives and 34% (n = 36) obstetricians. The work experience staff had was less than 5 years (30%, n = 38); 10–19 years (19%, n = 28); 30–39 years (18%, n = 26). Staff were asked about emotional factors they encounter when working with cases of stillbirth, 52.4% (n = 54) mentioned stress, 31.1% (n = 32) mentioned confusion, 25.4% (n = 26) mentioned other factors (empathy, pain, depression, fear, powerlessness, feeling of unfairness, wanting to ease the pain, to help). 78.6% (n = 81) agreed, that their mood and overall feeling good is altered and affected them outside work. 16.7% (n = 17) think they sympathize with the patients on a more intimate level than they should as professionals. When asked about powerful emotions when working with these patients, specialists mentioned compassion (78.4%, n = 69), sadness (52.3%, n = 46) and helplessness (47.7%, n = 42).

5 April 2017

Conclusion. Healthcare professionals who work with patients in cases of stillbirth have many emotional factors contributing to their work, such as stress, confusion, sadness, compassion, pain and even depression or helplessness. Some specialists think they live through the emotional experience together with patients not as professionals, but on a more intimate level. Work with these patients is emotionally saturated and can affect the specialists even after working hours.