

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

From: Catherine Butterfield, Media and Communications Consultant, Mercy Health

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Mercy Health obstetrician shines during pandemic

A Mercy Health obstetrician has won the top prize at this year's Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG) Annual Scientific Meeting (ASM) for her research on obstetric and newborn outcomes during Melbourne's coronavirus pandemic lockdown.

Associate Professor Lisa Hui's research showed that public hospitals across Melbourne observed increases in infant birth weights over the 90th percentile, as well as increases in rates of maternal obesity during the first Melbourne lockdown period.

She also found there was a decline in exclusive breastmilk feeding during stage 3 and stage 4 restrictions.

A/Prof Hui was awarded the prestigious Aldo Vacca Award for the best free communication for her talk on the "Collaborative Maternity and Newborn Dashboard (CoMaND) for the COVID19 pandemic: real-time monitoring of perinatal services performance indicators in Victoria".

The CoMaND project collects a wide range of maternal and newborn outcomes from public hospitals each month and produces a report that is circulated to health services, the COVID-19 expert obstetric advisory group to Safer Care Victoria, and the Chair of the Consultative Council of Obstetric and Paediatric Morbidity and Mortality.

The collaboration was supported by grants from the Norman Beischer Research Foundation and the University of Melbourne Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

"It has been incredibly valuable for our clinical leaders to be able to monitor the impacts of changes to maternity care during the pandemic," A/Prof Hui said.

"The support of our funders was crucial to this work. Without this resource, we would not know if we were doing more harm than good with our pandemic response.

"It has been incredibly gratifying to have 100 per cent of public maternity hospitals in Melbourne signing up to the collaboration so that we can rapidly detect any concerning safety signals in perinatal outcomes such as stillbirth or preterm birth."

The CoMaND project will continue to report on the impacts of the pandemic on mothers and babies throughout 2021 and 2022.

Another Mercy Health obstetrician Dr Teresa MacDonald has been awarded the RANZCOG ASM's Early Career Researcher Award for her presentation "Reduced growth velocity from the mid-trimester is associated with placental insufficiency in fetuses born at a normal birthweight".

Dr MacDonald, who collaborated with Dr Lucy Kennedy and other co-authors, analysed the changes in estimated fetal weight and babies' abdominal circumference measurements between the routine 20-week scan and a 36-week growth scan. They found those who showed slowing growth – even if their final birthweight was in the normal range – demonstrated outcomes associated with a more poorly performing placenta.

These findings are important because they could help clinicians better identify normal sized babies who might be at increased risk of stillbirth. Future studies are needed to confirm these findings and are currently underway.

– Ends –

For interviews and photo opportunities, please contact:

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