

Secondary post-partum haemorrhage: a recurrent condition?

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Secondary postpartum haemorrhage is an uncommon complication, affecting 0.5 to 1.5 percent of all deliveries (¹). It was defined by Dewhurst as excessive bleeding occurring after the first 24 hours following a delivery until the sixth week of the puerperium (²). It is most commonly due to retained placental fragments, but it may also be caused by endometritis, trauma and fibroids. In many cases the cause is unknown.

A retrospective study of the clinical features of patients admitted with this condition in the two main district hospitals in Bournemouth (United Kingdom) was carried out. A total of 48 cases were admitted between January 1990 and May 1991 at the Royal Victoria and Poole General Hospitals. The total number of births within this period was 6535, giving an incidence of 0.73 percent. Of the cases, 16 were primiparas and 32 multiparas. The clinical and laboratory findings are detailed in Table 1. The antenatal course and obstetric events preceding admission did not differ significantly from the general obstetric population.

However in six of the 32 multiparas (18.8 percent) there was a history of secondary postpartum haemorrhage in a previous pregnancy. They all had normal vaginal deliveries. Four required surgical

Table 1. – *Clinical and Laboratory Findings.*

	No. (%)
Pyrexia (more than 37.5 C)	3 (6)
Shock	1 (2)
Surgical evacuation	32 (67)
Placental tissue diagnosed clinically	24 (50)
Blood transfusion	5 (10)
Hysterectomy	1 (2)
Anaemia (Hb less than 10 g/dl)	3 (6)
Histology available on curettages	15 (31)
Histology confirms placental tissue	12 (80)
Histology confirms inflammation	3 (20)
Positive HVS, endocervical cultures	5 (10)

evacuation, with histologically proven placental fragments in only one case. Five of these six multiparas were bottle-feeding their babies, in contrast to only 26% in the general population.

Although the numbers are small, they are suggestive of a significant subgroup of patients in whom secondary postpartum haemorrhage may be a recurrent condition.

REFERENCES

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- 2) Dewhurst C.J.: "Integrated obstetrics and gynaecology for postgraduates", 4th Edn. Ed. C.R. Whitfield. Oxford. Blackwell Scientific Publications, p. 467, 1987.

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