Early Fetal Echo Detects Most Cardiac Lesions

Reno, Nev. — Fetal echocardiography before 16 weeks of gestation is feasible and can detect a substantial proportion of cardiac lesions, investigators reported in a poster presentation at the annual meeting of the American Society for Maternal Fetal Medicine.

The technique does have limitations regarding accurate visualization of the great artery relationship and the crux of the heart. It may therefore be best to reserve early echocardiography for cases at the greatest risk for cardiac defects. Second- trimester echocardiograms remain the gold standard, concluded Fiona McAuliffe, M.D., of University College Dublin (Ireland) and colleagues.

The study involved 160 fetal echocardiograms performed before the 16th week, with an average gestation time of 13.5 weeks. Investigators used the transabdominal approach for 100 cases, and the transvaginal approach in 60 cases in which the transabdominal approach yielded poor visualization.

Of the 160 patients, 108 were referred because of maternal transudancy greater than the 95th percentile, 51 because of a family history of congenital cardiac defects, and 9 because of the presence of extracardiac lesions.

Adequate cardiac examinations were possible in 152 cases, and pregnancy outcome was available in 137 cases. Of those, there were 20 cardiac defects. Seventeen (70%) showed an abnormality on the early echocardiogram, and six (30%) were normal.

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