Disturbances in Sleep Linked to Adverse Perinatal Outcomes

BY SUSAN LONDON

SEATTLE — Sleep disturbances during pregnancy increase the risk of adverse perinatal outcomes such as gestational diabetes and cesarean delivery, according to an overview of research presented at the annual meeting of the Associated Professional Sleep Societies.

“Sleep disturbances are common during pregnancy,” said Bilgay Izi Balserak, Ph.D., of the University of Glasgow (Scotland) Sleep Centre. “The majority of pregnant women experience some level of sleep disturbance, especially in the third trimester of pregnancy.”

A 2007 poll conducted by the National Sleep Foundation, Washington, found that 84% of pregnant women reported experiencing sleep problems at least a few nights per week, she noted. This compared with 67% of all women surveyed.

Altered sleep during pregnancy stems from a variety of hormonal, physiologic, and psychological factors.

Dr. Balserak

Several studies have found correlations between unfavorable sleep parameters in late pregnancy and elevated levels of depressive symptoms, both at that time and in the early postpartum period, she noted.

In a study that was conducted among women in the third trimester of pregnancy that used the Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression (CES-D) scale, relative to their nondepressed counterparts, the depressed women had a greater frequency of sleep disturbances overall, as well as a longer latency to sleep onset, greater difficulty in maintaining sleep, poorer sleep quality, and less sleep time (J. Perinat. Neonatal Nurs. 2007;21:123-9).

“Regarding management, nonpharmacologic interventions should be considered as the first choice, including lifestyle modifications and cognitive-behavioral therapy strategies,” she recommended.

Providers should encourage women to adopt healthy lifestyle behaviors, such as daily exercise, that may improve sleep, Dr. Balserak said. They should counsel women about measures to address specific symptoms disrupting sleep, such as modifying eating habits to reduce heartburn.

“If pharmacological treatment is necessary, it should be used with caution due to potential side effects on the fetus,” she concluded.

Dr. Balserak reported that she had no conflicts of interest in association with her presentation.

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