New Study Shows Pregnancy-Related Deaths in Hospitals on the Decline, Deaths at Home on the Rise

GRAPEVINE, Texas — While the number of pregnancy-related deaths around the world is declining, the maternal mortality rate in the United States continues to be a problem, more than doubling since 1987, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Many of these deaths are preventable. In recent years, the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine (SMFM) has introduced programs to help reduce maternal mortality.

In a study to be presented today at the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine’s (SMFM) annual meeting, The Pregnancy Meeting™, researchers will unveil findings that suggest pregnancy-related deaths in healthcare settings, such as a hospital, emergency room, or outpatient medical facility, are declining, while pregnancy-related deaths in other settings, such as a person’s home, are increasing significantly.

Researchers analyzed maternal mortality data from the CDC and the National Center for Health Statistics from 2003 to 2016, including place of death, cause of the death, race/ethnicity, and age. The study found that maternal deaths occurring in hospitals, emergency rooms, and outpatient medical facilities decreased by as much as 24 percent, whereas deaths occurring outside a medical facility increased significantly during this time period.

“The problem of increasing maternal mortality ratios in the United States is a multifaceted one, potentially involving not only the quality of medical care received by pregnant women, but also other issues, including access to care, cultural norms that may lead women to avoid available care, insurance and payment issues, and other social issues such as drugs, homicide, suicide, and domestic violence,” said lead study author Angela Burgess, MD, a maternal-fetal medicine fellow at Baylor College of Medicine and Texas Children’s Pavilion for Women in Houston. “Our data suggest that the quality of medical care received by pregnant women in the U.S. is improving, possibly as a result of efforts by organizations such as SMFM to address this issue, and that the increase in maternal mortality seen in recent years involves social issues not under the direct control of the medical community.”

About SMFM
The Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine (SMFM) is a non-profit, membership organization based in Washington, DC. With more than 4,000 physicians, scientists and women's health professionals around the world, the Society supports the clinical practice of maternal-fetal medicine by providing education, promoting research and engaging in advocacy to optimize the health of high-risk pregnant women and their babies. SMFM hosts an annual scientific meeting in which new ideas and research related to high risk pregnancies are unveiled and discussed. For more information, visit SMFM.org and connect with organization on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. For the latest 2020 Annual Meeting news and updates, follow the hashtag #smfm20.