

'Most baby deaths and brain damage avoidable'

By Daily Telegraph Reporter

FAILURE to follow guidelines and best practice in hospitals is contributing to incidents of newborn death and brain damage, according to a new report.

The Each Baby Counts study found nearly three quarters of affected babies might have had a different outcome with better maternity unit care.

For the study, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) examined 1,123 term births in 2016 that ended in stillbirth (124), neonatal death (145) or severe brain injury (854).

Its research found that in almost half (45 per cent) of reviewed cases, guidelines and best practice were not followed. Reasons for failures included gaps in train-

ing, lack of recognition of problems, communication issues, heavy workload, staffing levels and local guidelines not being based on best available evidence. The report recommended addressing workload issues, creating

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individualised pregnancy plans for women and ensuring local guidelines were kept in line with national guidance. It concluded that 71 per cent of 955 births where sufficient information was available might have had a different outcome if different care had been provided.

Areas requiring improvements include identifying

and acting on risk factors, monitoring of fetal well-being with cardiotocography and blood sampling, and education or training.

The RCOG is now calling for a UK national centre of excellence for maternity care, to make it "the safest place in the world to have a baby".

The aim of its Each Baby Counts initiative is to halve the number of babies who die or are left severely disabled by 2020. Since data compilation began in 2015, improvements in the amount and quality of investigations have been recorded.

Jackie Doyle-Price, the health minister, said: "We are giving staff the support they need to continue to improve maternity safety and have made the largest ever investment in midwifery training to ensure the NHS has the skills it needs."

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