



■ Prenatal care is a necessity for health of Choctaw County infants

By Dee Ann Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

BUTLER – “Regular prenatal care gives them their very best chance,” says Vanessa Cornelison of Tombigbee Healthcare Authority’s HealthStart Maternity Care Program in Butler.

According to the March of Dimes, one in every 10 babies born in Alabama in 2004 suffered from low birth weight. It is a problem that, experts say, leads to difficulties that can plague a child throughout his life, and one that has led Alabama to be ranked among the lowest states in potential success for its children.

The recent Quality Counts 2007 report by Education Week Magazine lists ranks Alabama at 45th in the nation, in part, because of the high incidence of low birth weight babies who are born in the state. According to a report issued last May by the Alabama Department of Public Health, Alabama had 59,170 live births in 2004 (the last year on record), and of that number 6,204, or 10.5%, were at or below 5.5 pounds.

Locally, about 6.5% of babies born to mothers in Choctaw County in 2004 were low-birth-weight infants. For those infants, they begin with several strikes against them. Low birth weight can lead to developmental problems that include learning difficulties and a host of other issues that can affect children throughout their lives.

While there are a number of factors that could cause low birth weight, one of those factors is inadequate prenatal care.

Working with mothers-to-be in Choctaw County, Cornelison helps to give local women quality prenatal care throughout their pregnancies. It is that care, she says, that is vital to giving babies their best start possible.

“Low birth weight can



Photo courtesy ringofhope.com

Premature and low birth weight babies often have multiple long-term problems. The incidence of prematurity and low birth weight can be lessened through good prenatal care.

Factors affecting premature births

• Factors affecting preterm birth fall into the following categories:

- Demographic characteristics
- Genetic characteristics
- Behavioral and environmental factors
- Medical and obstetrical history of the mother

• The most consistently identified risk factors include a history of preterm birth, multiple pregnancy, and uterine or cervical abnormalities.

• Other possible risk factors include: infection, diabetes mellitus, hypertension, late or no prenatal care, smoking, alcohol and drug use.

• In Alabama in 2004, 14.2% of single births were preterm, compared to 69.6% of multiple births. Multiple births represent 3.5% of live births in Alabama.

• Smoking is an important factor that determines the health and birth weight of babies. In 2003, 25.6% of women of childbearing age in Alabama were smokers.

• While being obese does not directly cause preterm delivery, it does increase rates of medical complications that do contribute to it. In Alabama, 30.7% of women of childbearing age were obese in 2003.

(Information from the March of Dimes)

be caused by many different factors,” says Cornelison. “But the lack of prenatal care can be a big contributor.”

Most babies who are born with low birth weight are born prematurely, before the 37th week of gestation. Premature delivery can be caused by several factors

that occur during pregnancy, including the mother’s predisposition for early delivery or health problems that bring about early labor. Although not all low birth weight babies are born early, most premature babies have low birth weight as one of multiple problems to overcome.

Though premature birth is not always due to a lack of medical care, adequate prenatal care can stop potential problems from developing before the mother goes into labor too early.

“Prenatal care is vital to find potential problems as early as possible in the pregnancy,” says Cornelison. “Unless the mother has had a pre-

vious preterm delivery, you can’t determine who will have preterm labor. There are so many factors that determine it. Other times, babies can be full term, but still be under 5 pounds. That’s why it’s so important to get those check-ups more often in those last weeks so any problems can be detected and possibly prevented.”

Cornelison says that the best course of action during pregnancy is early prenatal care by the 13th week of gestation. But for many women in rural areas like Choctaw County, transportation to and from their prenatal check-ups can be a factor. For many of those women, transportation vouchers now offered

Born too small

through Alabama Medicaid may offer a solution.

“Transportation vouchers may have an affect on these mothers,” Cornelison says. “If they are on Alabama Medicaid, they can get a voucher to help pay their expenses to go back and forth to the doctor. That gets rid of one reason why they don’t go for their check-ups. They may still have little access to a car, and travel distance may still be a factor for those in this area. It’s much easier to get a 15-minute ride to the doctor than it is to find someone to take you 35 or 40 miles.”

Despite the lack of a local hospital, in comparison to other counties Choctaw County fares better than some when it comes prenatal care. About 20.9% of local women do not get adequate care during pregnancy, compared to 21.9% statewide and 24.6% nationally.

Oddly, the Quality Counts 2007 report does not mention that Alabama’s percentage of mothers who receive inadequate prenatal care is actually better than that of the nation as a whole.

Monroe County has a higher percentage of low birth weight babies than other counties in the state. Their percentage for 2004, according to Health Start, was 16.1%. The largest percentage of mothers not receiving adequate prenatal care in the state occurs in Greene County where the number stands at 62.1%. Walker County records the lowest percentage at 8.6%.

Even with adequate prenatal care, there are still some infants who are born too early or too small due to other factors. Health problems such as diabetes or obesity or high blood pressure can be contributing factors, as can cigarette smoking.

“Smoking is a definite factor,” says Cornelison. “When women come to us, we try to get them to stop if they smoke. It definitely plays a role in low

birth weight.”

Statistics suggest that race may also be somewhat of a contributing factor. Perhaps due to factors like genetics and health-related issues like high blood pressure and diabetes, black mothers are more likely to give birth to low birth weight babies. In Choctaw County, 9.9% of the mothers whose babies weighed less than 5.5 pounds in 2004 were black. Only 2.7% were white.

In an effort to address the problems that result from low birth weight, the organization ChildFind actively works to locate affected children to give them the help that they need to overcome the problems, in particular in the area of education. ChildFind is a screening and evaluation program designed to locate, identify, and refer all young children with disabilities who may be in need of Early Intervention or Preschool Special Education services as determined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). One of their targeted groups are children born with low birth weight.

“Child Find locates low birth weight babies and does educational and developmental work with them,” explains Cornelison. “They really want to pick up those low birth weight babies because of all the developmental problems that the children typically have.”

With multiple factors influencing the health of newborns in general – as well as the host of problems that can occur during pregnancy – Cornelison says that the best bet for a healthy baby with fewer long-term problems is good prenatal care.

“We want to give them a good start by getting them in as early as we can,” Cornelison says. “It’s their best chance to avoid many of these problems. That’s what prenatal care is for.”

NOTICE OF PROPOSED CERTIFICATE OF NEED APPLICATION

Rush Hospital/Butler Hospital, Inc., d/b/a Choctaw General Hospital, has filed a Certificate of Need Application for:

The replacement and relocation of a 40-bed general hospital located in Choctaw County that was closed in 1993, with a 25-bed, Critical Access Hospital. The replacement facility will be located in or near Butler (Choctaw County), Alabama. The proposed replacement hospital will serve residents of Choctaw County.

An exact site has not yet been identified but the proposed hospital will be located either in or proximal to the corporate limits of Butler, AL 36904.

Individuals seeking further information regarding the application may contact:

James E. Sanders
Deputy Director
State Health Planning and Development Agency
100 North Union Street, Suite 870
Post Office Box 303025
Montgomery, Alabama 36130-3025
(334) 242-4103
Fax: (334) 242-4113

It's your money... why wait?

Get your cash FAST!

If you're tired of waiting to get your tax refund, we can help. We'll prepare your tax return and file it electronically so you get your money fast...sometimes even the same day!

Kathy's Tax Service
38 E. Main Gilbertown, AL
251-843-5153

Lifestyle dangers for your infant

Studies have found that certain lifestyle and environmental factors may mean a greater risk for preterm delivery:

- Late or no prenatal care
- Smoking
- Drinking alcohol
- Using illegal drugs
- Exposure to the medication DES
- Domestic violence, including physical, sexual, or emotional abuse
- Lack of social support
- Stress
- Long working hours with long periods of standing

Tune in to WPRN Radio, 107.7 FM for SUNDAY SCHOOL HIGHLIGHTS With Rev. Joseph Mason

Monday-Friday from 9:40-10 a.m.
And on Sundays from 7:15-8 a.m.

FREE ANNOUNCEMENTS for local churches! Call Clara Dickinson at (205) 459-3408 or Bonnie Gaines at (205) 459-3561 to have your announcement included.

To speak directly with Pastor Mason, listeners and Sun readers may call (205) 372-3681.