

## New approach needed to tackle fetal alcohol exposure

A consensus report from The FASD Trust, with support from almost 70 specialists, is proposing a new approach to identify those exposed to alcohol in the womb and enable those affected to access consistent support.

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) is an umbrella term for a range of conditions caused when a developing fetus is exposed to alcohol in the womb. The effects can be physical – including particular facial characteristics – but also mental or behavioural such as anxiety, social

communication difficulties, poor attention and even criminal behaviour.

The FASD Trust has produced the report as part of its ongoing commitment to raising awareness about the challenges confronting the prevention, diagnosis and management of FASD in the UK.

The document recommends a new care pathway across disciplines and professions so that FASD is considered and either followed up or ruled out consistently by a range of services from obstetrics, gynaecology and midwifery to paediatrics and psychiatry.



It is hoped that raising awareness of the condition will have a further impact on the practice of social workers, the education system and voluntary organizations.

Five key themes for development are highlighted in the report:

1. The need for early diagnosis – to prevent advanced problems developing
2. Challenges to diagnosis – including mis-diagnosis as a result of a lack of awareness and prenatal information
3. Lack of information – including poor connection between maternal and infant records
4. Need for further information and education – across professions and disciplines to ask the right questions

5. A need to change policy and develop services – to overcome the current ‘postcode lottery’ in diagnosis and encourage FASD to be taught on health and social care curriculums.

International guidelines for assessing and diagnosing FASD exist but, until now, there has been no established process, or care pathway, in the UK for recording information about FASD, referring people for support or agreement on the issues that need to be explored.

The FASD Trust (2013) Consensus Statement Regarding the Recognition and Diagnosis of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) Across the Lifespan in the UK: Development of Proposed UK Clinical Pathways. The FASD Trust, Charlbury, Oxford ([www.fasdtrust.co.uk](http://www.fasdtrust.co.uk))

## Increased deaths after heart attacks linked to air pollution

Air pollution contributes to an increased number of deaths among patients who have been admitted to hospital with heart attacks (Tonne and Wilkinson, 2013).

The largest study yet to investigate the links between airborne particulate matter (PM) and patient survival after hospital admission for acute coronary syndrome found death rates increased with increased exposure to PM<sub>2.5</sub> (particles that measure 2.5 µm in diameter or less). The main sources of PM<sub>2.5</sub> in the UK are road traffic and industry.

The researchers linked records of 154 204 patients who survived hospital admission for acute coronary syndrome in England and Wales between 2004 and 2007 with

modelled average air pollution concentrations for 2004–10.

Dr Cathryn Tonne, lecturer in environmental epidemiology at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, London, said: ‘We found that for every 10 µg/m<sup>3</sup> increase in PM<sub>2.5</sub> there was a 20% increase in the death rate. For example, over 1 year of follow-up after patients had been admitted to hospital with acute coronary syndrome, there would be 20% more deaths among patients exposed to PM<sub>2.5</sub> levels of 20 µg/m<sup>3</sup>, compared to patients exposed to PM<sub>2.5</sub> levels of 10 µg/m<sup>3</sup>.’

Tonne C, Wilkinson P (2013) Long-term exposure to air pollution is associated with survival following acute coronary syndrome. *Eur Heart J* Feb 19 (Epub ahead of print)

## Lung will cause most cancer deaths in European women

Lung cancer is likely to overtake breast cancer as the main cause of cancer death among European women by the middle of this decade, according to new research (Malvezzi et al, 2013). In the UK and Poland it has already overtaken breast cancer as the main cause of cancer deaths in women.

The study by researchers in Italy and Switzerland predicts that just over 1.3 million people will die from cancer (737 747 men and 576 489 women) in the 27 countries of the European Union in 2013.

Although the actual numbers have increased when compared with 2009 (the year for which there are World Health Organization mortality

data for most EU countries), the rate (age-standardized per 100 000 population) of people who die from the disease has declined. Since 2009 there has been a 6% fall among men and a 4% fall among women.

However, lung cancer death rates continue to rise among women in all countries, while breast cancer rates fall. In 2013 there will be an estimated 88 886 deaths (14.6 per 100 000 men and 82 640 deaths (14 per 100 000 women) from lung cancer.

Malvezzi M, Bertuccio P, Levi F, La Vecchia C, Negri E (2013) European cancer mortality predictions for the year 2013. *Ann Oncol* 24: 792–800