

Antenatal diagnosis of diaphragmatic hernia: parents' emotional and cognitive reactions.

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PURPOSE: The aim of this study was to assess parent's emotional and cognitive reactions to the prenatal diagnosis of diaphragmatic hernia in their prospective children. **METHODS:** A survey was conducted by means of a questionnaire. In the period ranging from 1997 to 2002, 40 couples in whom an established diagnosis of diaphragmatic hernia was made in their fetus were seen for prenatal consultation at a tertiary referral center. **RESULTS:** Overall response rate was 93% (37 couples). Mean period since diagnosis for compilation of the questionnaire was 2 weeks. Mean gestational age at diagnosis was 25 weeks (range, 16 to 35 weeks). All parents lacked prediagnostic knowledge of diaphragmatic hernia and consider a single consultation with the paediatric surgeon inadequate to have a clear understanding of the anomaly. Only 1 mother and 1 father reported they understood all the information given by the surgeon. The most frequent (75%) feeling during and after the consultation was fear. Most parents (70%) referred to the intense emotions as the factor that made it difficult to follow the surgeon's explanations as well as to ask questions. **CONCLUSIONS:** Because of the incompatibility of emotional distress and optimum learning, impairment of early comprehension of information about diaphragmatic hernia is unavoidable. Therefore, we believe that follow-up antenatal consultations and provision of written and visual illustration are extremely important to facilitate informed choices.

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