








EdWISE

Topic Title: Assessment and Management of  
the patient presenting to the Emergency  
Department with bleeding in the first  
trimester of pregnancy

For on site tutorials as part of the remote simulation program  
Obstetrics 1

This project was possible due to funding made available by Health Workforce Australia



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## Introductions



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Very quick round the room to assess stage of professional development for each participant.

## General Aims

- Learn in a team setting
- Blend clinical skills with team skills
- Reflect critically on practice

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**These aims are the same for all sessions – please do not modify**

**Speakers' notes**

- This session, and package as a whole, involves learning together. Learning with the teams that you work with helps that team to function more efficiently and effectively. It allows you to learn from each other, explore different perspectives and to understand the importance of all members of the team.
- We are targeting higher level learning – applied skills and performance in contextualised events. This is through team discussion and also through working through simulated scenarios as a team. It also allows you to put into practice knowledge attained from the eLearning and other solo learning environments.
- To review and reflect upon our own practice and current best practice standards. During our feedback sessions we will facilitate this but we would also encourage you to reflect on your practice and experience after these sessions.

## Ground Rules

- Participation
- Privacy
- Confidentiality
- Disclaimer
- Debriefing
- Mobile phones

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**These aims are the same for all sessions – please do not modify**

**Speakers notes**

- Challenge of video conferencing tips: don't change your seat, speak up nice & clearly
- Details collected and de-identified for reporting purposes
- Signed form, don't speak outside about how people performed as not necessarily indicative of real life. This is a chance to try new things, don't tell anyone about the scenarios as they are used again on subsequent courses.
- We try to use best evidence practice and strive to include as up-to-date material as possible. Please do refer to your local policies, guidelines and protocols.
- Debriefing is a chance to reflect upon what we did and how that translates to the workplace. Please use this time to explore the complexities of performance and decision making. Please contribute, we will all learn from each other's experiences.
- Like most things in life, the more that you put in the more you will take away with you.
- It is an open forum where everyone's ideas and thoughts are to be valued.
- If you could please switch your phones off or to silent or vibrate for the duration of the course.

## Session Objectives

- Approach to the woman in early pregnancy presenting to the emergency department
- Assessment of vaginal bleeding
- Exclusion of ectopic pregnancy
- Diagnostic testing in early pregnancy
- Management of miscarriage and ectopic pregnancy.

## Introduction

- Vaginal Bleeding occurs in 20-40% of first trimester pregnancies.
- Miscarriage is the most common cause.
- Ectopic Pregnancy is a potentially life threatening differential diagnosis.
- Manage with the structured ABCDE approach to the patient.

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Vaginal bleeding in the first trimester occurs in 20 – 40% of pregnancies. The most common cause of bleeding in early pregnancy is miscarriage, which occurs in 10 - 20% of clinical pregnancies.

An ectopic pregnancy is potentially life threatening and should be assessed for in all presentations of bleeding in early pregnancy. Other causes of bleeding include implantation of the pregnancy and causes of vaginal bleeding incidental to pregnancy, such as uterine polyps, infection, and gynaecological malignancy. Ectopic pregnancy affects approximately 1 in 80 pregnancies. The classic symptoms of ectopic pregnancy are abdominal pain, amenorrhoea and vaginal bleeding, though these are not universal. A ruptured ectopic pregnancy may cause haemodynamic instability, which is a medical emergency. For the patient who been diagnosed with an ectopic pregnancy and is haemodynamically stable, treatment is often provided on an outpatient basis after consultation with the gynaecology service.

## Assessment

- Rapidly assess for haemodynamic stability.
- Perform a focused history and examination.
- Investigations aim to confirm pregnancy and establish location.
- Undertake a risk assessment for ectopic pregnancy.
- Consultation with specialist services will be required, often on an outpatient basis.

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Assessment of the patient who is bleeding in early pregnancy focuses on establishing the diagnosis of pregnancy, the location of the pregnancy and the haemodynamic stability of the patient. This assessment involves taking a focused history, clinical examination and appropriate investigations to create a differential diagnosis and perform a risk assessment of the clinical condition of the individual patient. Management of early bleeding in pregnancy is dependent on the diagnosis and the stability of the patient, matched to the available resources.



## Focused History

- Bleeding and Pain.
- High risk symptoms for potential instability.
- Pregnancy history – current and previous.
- Risk factors for ectopic pregnancy.
- Co-morbidities
- Social history

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A focused history considers establishing pregnancy including the last menstrual period date and a description of the menstrual cycle. Other pregnancy related history, such as previous children and pregnancies should be ascertained. Investigations already performed to establish the diagnosis of pregnancy are to be reviewed. A consideration of other causes of bleeding, pain or other symptoms must be included in the assessment process, and the interaction of co-morbidities will affect the ongoing management.

Bleeding and abdominal pain require specific attention during the history taking process. The extent of bleeding should be elicited as this influences the need for urgent resuscitation. The presence of large clots, multiple, frequent sanitary pads soaked through every 1 – 2 hours and/or the presence of light headedness or syncope are suggestive significant bleeding. Abdominal pain located in either iliac fossae or shoulder tip pain are symptoms suggestive of an ectopic pregnancy. However, the absence of pain does not exclude this diagnosis. Midline pain may be associated with a miscarriage and may be cramping in nature.

A previous medical history of pelvic inflammatory disease, adnexal surgery, previous ectopic pregnancy, assisted reproductive technology, intra uterine contraceptive device in situ, use of emergency contraception or documented tubal pathology all increase the likelihood of ectopic. A history of two or more consecutive miscarriages or conditions such as anti-phospholipid syndrome and uterine anomaly can suggest bleeding may be related to a miscarriage.

## Examination

- Vital Signs
  - HR, RR, BP, Sats, Temp, BSL
- Abdominal Examination
- Bimanual Examination
- Speculum Examination
- General clinical assessment

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The physical examination includes a set of vital signs such as heart rate, blood pressure and respiratory rate. Tachycardia and hypotension or orthostatic changes such as a postural drop raises the suspicion of a haemodynamically unstable patient requiring urgent fluid resuscitation. Presentation with hypotension and bradycardia may be due to cervical stimulation with products of conception in the cervical canal causing a vagal response. Removal of the products of conception can rapidly improve the clinical condition.

In early pregnancy (less than 12 weeks gestation), the uterus is not palpable abdominally, as it will not be above the pelvic brim. The location of tenderness and presence of peritonism, may indicate rupture in the case of an ectopic pregnancy. Speculum and bimanual examination should be used to assess the exact amount of bleeding present, the state of the cervical os, whether open or closed, the size of the uterus and for adenexal or cervical excitation. Speculum examination can also reveal other sources of bleeding such as vaginal lacerations, gynaecological malignancies, warts or cervical polyps.

The accuracy of the initial clinical history and examination is less than 50%. Additional investigations are frequently required to locate the pregnancy and its viability or otherwise.

## Investigations

- Confirm pregnancy with bHCG.
- Seek pregnancy location with ultrasound.
- Risk Assessment for ectopic or miscarriage.
- Ongoing management of pregnancy or bleeding.
  - Rhesus status
  - Serial assessment

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HCG (human chorionic gonadotrophin) is synthesised by the cells of the placenta to maintain the corpus luteum during pregnancy, the beta sub-unit is tested for in pregnancy. Modern monoclonal antibody based kits can detect BhCG at 25 iu/l, a level reached nine days post conception (day 23 of a 28-day cycle). This level increases exponentially for the first 8 to 10 weeks following the last menstrual cycle. A single BhCG level does not diagnose the location of the pregnancy.. Serial measurements of BHCG every 48 hours are helpful during the first 6 weeks of pregnancy if USS is not diagnostic. A falling BHCG would be consistent with a non viable pregnancy. BHCG levels plateauing (not rising more than 1.66 in 48 hours) suggest an ectopic pregnancy whereas an appropriately rising BHCG are most consistent with a viable pregnancy.

The concept of combining ultrasound with measurement of the serum BHCG using a discriminatory zone has been well described.. Above a serum BHCG 1500 iu/l, an intrauterine pregnancy will usually be visualised with transvaginal ultrasonography (TVS). However, it should be noted that the discriminatory zone may vary among institutions due to different types of equipment, level of experience of the operator and assay techniques. Therefore, the absence of an intrauterine pregnancy on TVS with a BhCG >1500iu/L may suggest an abnormal or ectopic pregnancy. At levels below 1000 iu/L, pregnancy of unknown location and miscarriage are both possible outcomes.

TVS will be required in the majority of women to determine the location of the

## Management

- The haemodynamically unstable need immediate resuscitation.
- Rapid ABCDE assessment whilst simultaneously managing patient.
- Fluid and blood boluses may be required.
- Assess and treat for cervical shock.
- Early involvement of Obstetric specialist.

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### Management of bleeding in early pregnancy

The ABCDE structured approach is used to evaluate all patients with bleeding in early pregnancy. Assessment of haemodynamic stability will determine the need for acute resuscitation of the patient.

In the haemodynamically unstable patient, the immediate management will depend on the cause of the haemodynamic instability. The patient must be managed in an area with cardiac and respiratory monitoring. Two large bore cannulas should be inserted and bloods sent for FBC, BhCG, coagulations studies and cross match.

Hypotension and tachycardia as a result of extreme blood loss should be treated with a bolus of normal saline 20ml per kg aiming SBP>90. Cross-matched blood products should be commenced if the bleeding is severe and any coagulopathy should be reversed.

In the unstable patient with hypotension and bradycardia, it is important to exclude cervical shock due to products of conception in the cervical os. A vaginal speculum examination will reveal the products of conception protruding through the external cervical os, which can be carefully removed with Rampley sponge holding forceps. This will reverse the vagal response. Any tissue removed during the examination should be sent for histopathological examination.

There are several options for management of the haemodynamically stable patient with vaginal bleeding in early pregnancy. These options can be offered in consultation with the obstetrics and gynaecology team.

## Management - Miscarriage

- Several options for treatment of a miscarriage exist
  - Expectant
  - Medical
  - Surgical
- Psycho-social considerations are important

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The options for treatment of miscarriage include expectant management, medical management and/or surgical uterine evacuation. Ideally, the patient should be given the choice of treatment option. Expectant management of an incomplete miscarriage is as effective as surgical evacuation of the uterus. However, success rate of expectant management for a missed miscarriage is much lower compared to surgical management. It is important that all women undergoing expectant management have direct telephone access to staff for advice and support. This is because vaginal bleeding may increase significantly, and so the patient may need to present to hospital. Hospital beds must be available should admission be required. Complete resolution may take several weeks and this should be carefully explained. Medical management using prostaglandin analogues (misoprostol or gemeprost) with or without anti-progesterone priming (mifepristone) is an alternative option, if available at the hospital. Surgical uterine evacuation is indicated if vital signs are unstable or in the presence of retained infected tissue.

## Management - Ectopic

- Management is dependent on
  - Haemodynamic stability
  - BhCG levels
  - Ultrasound findings
- Surgical, Medical and Expectant treatments are options considered by the obstetric services.

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Patients may undergo expectant, medical or surgical treatment for an ectopic pregnancy. Expectant management of an ectopic pregnancy is an option in the case of a falling BHCG with serum BHCG <100IU/L, tubal mass <3cm with no signs of tubal rupture or haemoperitoneum on transvaginal ultrasound and haemodynamic stability. Medical management involves a single intramuscular dose of methotrexate 50mg/, which is an anti-metabolite. It prevents the growth of rapidly dividing cells by interfering with DNA synthesis. Indications for medical management may include a baseline serum BHCG <5,000IU/L, an ectopic pregnancy <3cm diameter on TVS, the absence of foetal heart motion on TVS, no significant haemoperitoneum and readily accessible follow up and emergency care. The indications for surgical therapy include haemodynamic instability, impending or ongoing ectopic mass rupture, or the patient being not able or willing to comply with medical therapy post-treatment follow-up.

## The Case

- You have been asked to assess Flora MacDonald who is a 27 year-old primipara, who presents with vaginal bleeding.

Please remind the participants that the patient is a real person and they are not to hurt her.

## Summary

- Assessment of early pregnancy should begin with determining haemodynamic stability.
- Ectopic pregnancy is a potentially life threatening diagnosis.
- Expectant, Medical or Surgical treatment may be appropriate.
- Communicate compassionately with the woman and her partner.



## References

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**Obstetrics Module Expert Working Party and Peer Review Team**

Marilena Pelosi, Midwife, RPAH

Tanya Nippita, Obstetrician RNSH

Ngi Nyugen, Intensivist, Nepean Hospital

Lisa Robinson, Obstetrics Fellow RNSH

Nadia Sawkins, Simulation Fellow, RPAH

**Educational consultants:**

Stephanie O'Regan Nurse Educator SCSSC

Leonie Watterson Director Simulation Division SCSSC

John Vassiliadis Deputy Director SCSSC

Clare Richmond FACEM Royal Prince Alfred Hospital

Morgan Sherwood Simulation Fellow SCSSC

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