Fertility and pregnancy care

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THIS EDITION OF Australian Journal of General Practice (AJGP) addresses issues of fertility and pregnancy care. In Australia, the maternal mortality ratio has decreased 100-fold since the early 1900s, through improvements in the general health and wellbeing of the population and advances in medical care. A reduction in perinatal mortality of more than sevenfold has also occurred over the same period. Increasingly, it is understood that further improvements in perinatal outcomes and intergenerational health can be achieved by optimising the maternal environment before conception, during pregnancy and in the first two years of a child’s life. The term ‘first 1000 days’ was coined in 2010, at the World Bank headquarters in Washington DC, at a gathering of developmental experts who were looking at how best to address the issue of undernutrition in low-resource settings. The developing fetus and infant are at their most adaptable and most vulnerable during the first 1000 days. From the time of conception, the fetus reacts to environmental changes and is able to adapt in response to signals provided by the mother’s physical and mental state. This powerful capacity is both a blessing and a curse, as adapting to adverse events can be suboptimally managed by health professionals and can affect the mobility and quality of life for women during pregnancy and beyond.

In many respects, we have world-class care in Australia for pregnant women. However, the challenge ahead is to recognise the broader context of women’s lives and integrate public policies on health and the environment, to enable communities to make choices that will improve the short-term and long-term outcomes for women and their children. We are taking the first step in Australia by recognising the significance of the first 1000 days, but this is yet to be promoted in national strategies. Small investments in this field have the potential for great gains, and we should be supporting the concept of the continuum of care that is promoted in low-resource settings.

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References

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