

## International pregnancy and infant loss day

October 15 is recognised around the world as International pregnancy and infant loss day. The purpose of this very special day is to allow families the opportunity to pause, reflect and honour the life of their precious baby/babies who have passed away. It is also a way to bring about greater public awareness of pregnancy loss, and the importance of acknowledging their lives and the impact it has on greater families.

In Australia alone, the rate of stillbirth is 6.7 per 1000 births of babies born over 20 weeks gestation, which equals almost 2 200 families each year (AIHW, 2019). These statistics fail to even take into account the number of families affected by miscarriage, which is the loss of a baby up to 20 weeks gestation.

A study by Heazell, Siassakos, Blencowe et al. (2016) claims that parents who have experienced stillbirth or a neonatal death face an increased risk of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress and suicidal ideation. One of the most common emotions expressed by parents is a sense of isolation in their grief, and up to 50% of bereaved parents feel unable to talk about their baby, as there is a general sense that it makes people feel uncomfortable (Flenady, Wojcieszek, Middleton et al., 2016)

Here at Mater Mothers' Hospital, we place great importance on recognising the life of any baby that has died prematurely, and encourage families to pause on the Thursday 15 of October at 7 pm and light a candle in their honour. This then creates a wave of glorious light around the world, as other countries also mark this date and time. This reminds us that we all stand united and are never alone in our grief, with each of us on our own journey of recognition and integration of loss.

Each year the Mater Mothers' Bereavement Service invites families who have delivered at Mater to attend the 'Wave of Light' service, and light a candle in honour of their loved one. This year the service will be live streamed. Although we will not be together physically, we see you, we feel your heartbreak and we understand the pain and grief. We stand with you.

Feel free to contact the bereavement team on 07 3163 6621 if you would like the link sent to your email address.

### References:

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). Stillbirths and neonatal deaths in Australia 2015 and 2016: in brief. Perinatal statistics series no. 36. Cat. no. PER 102. Canberra: AIHW, 2019.
- Flenady V, Wojcieszek AM, Middleton P, Ellwood D, Erwich JJ, Coory M, et al, for the Lancet Ending Preventable Stillbirths series study group. Stillbirths: recall to action in high-income countries. *The Lancet*. 2016;387(10019):691-702
- Heazell AEP, Siassakos D, Blencowe H, Burden C, Bhutta ZA, Cacciatore J, et al, for the Lancet Ending Preventable Stillbirths series study group. Stillbirths: economic and psychosocial consequences. *The Lancet*. 2016;387(10018):604-16.