



Why So Many Premies?



By Eleanor Rodgerson, MD

SOMETIMES WHAT I READ in the newspaper starts me thinking. Recently, I found a report of infant mortality statistics in this country. They have been rising, largely among prematures, of which there are many. I thought, "Why"?

Thirty to forty years ago, women again asserted themselves. They now had the vote, but they pointed out they were not accorded equality with the males. This state of affairs rankled. It was no fair. Books urging them to look out for themselves began to appear.

Women pointed to omissions and slights in the business world. They also said that doctors were prejudiced, studying men's disabilities, not women's. They urged women to take on their own medical care. Know one's own body and treat it naturally. Couldn't women do everything men could do?

To those who joined the revolution, it was a great leap forward. Careers became important for happiness. But the passage of years has revealed that not everything worked out as planned. There were risks that had been skipped over.

The push to improve the female's role in the world and her self-development backfired somewhat. She had dabbled in areas of which she was ignorant and which were not changeable. Women were not men. The latest feminist revolution began to subside, leaving a few unforeseen results.

Recent statistics show an increase in infant mortality rates and the increase appears to be due to prematurity. Can there be a relationship with women's ambitions? Are there consequences when the roles of maternity and motherhood are manipulated?

Women are mechanisms for increasing the population. There is no way yet to get around this fact. Any other method seems impossible at the moment. No matter what a woman desires, maternity is necessary.

Pushing for talents not originally part of femaleness has risks. Saving the years for careers delays normal pregnancy. Productive ovaries disappear and the substitute is artificial fertilization, one way or another. Then multiple births are not easy to control and prematures with precarious lives result.

There may be too much ambition that makes delaying pregnancy desirable.

Obstetrics has been a quiet profession, off by itself in the field of medicine, ignored by other specialties. Progress was made in mothers' health regimes and, later, the infant's welfare, both before and after birth, but there wasn't much to-do about labor.

The mechanism of labor is fixed, naturally. Still, attempts are made to shorten it to get back into the outside world. An operation may omit labor, but operations have a mortality rate and are limited. Yet the status quo is difficult to leave untouched. Drugs are used to stimulate the uterus to increase the number and strength of contractions and there can be

serious consequences for both mother and baby; enthusiasm for their use waxes and wanes.

Live long enough and you become part of the history you thought was found only in the history books. You can pick out events yourself and follow them through the years. The latest women's movement has made its mark. We read of its advantages, but there have been disadvantages, like the increased infant mortality due largely to premature infants. Remember that what happens today may bring consequences tomorrow.

ebr8809@aol.com

Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society
5380 Elvas Avenue #100 • Sacramento, CA 95819
916.452.2671 PH • 916.452.2690 FX • Email: info@ssvms.org

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