

Tommy's

Susan Quilliam

Writer, Broadcaster, Consultant and Trainer, Cambridge, UK

Correspondence to
Ms Susan Quilliam;
susan@susanquilliam.com
<http://www.susanquilliam.com>

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WHO ARE YOU?

We are a pregnancy research charity, which means that we fund research into the causes and prevention of miscarriage, stillbirth and premature birth. We also provide specialist support for affected families, and free health advice and support for all parents-to-be.

While most women have a happy and healthy pregnancy, current statistics suggest that one in four women in the UK loses a baby during pregnancy or birth. We believe that this level of heart-ache is unacceptable, so that is why we do what we do.

HOW DID THE ORGANISATION ORIGINATE?

In 1992, frustrated by the lack of knowledge as to why complications happen in pregnancy, two obstetricians working in the maternity unit at St Thomas's Hospital in London, UK were inspired to start fundraising for more research into such problems. Soon, their cause was taken up by others and a charity affectionately known as 'Tommy's' (after St Thomas's Hospital) was launched.

WHAT SERVICES DO YOU OFFER?

We have always provided a pregnancy advice line and in 2011, thanks to the Asda Foundation, this was re-launched as a freephone number offering not only information but also emotional support to parents. Tommy's PregnancyLine is staffed by midwives specially trained to offer bereavement counselling support for parents who have suffered a loss, advice on how best to plan for a baby following a complication, and lifestyle advice for women at risk of pregnancy health problems.

We also offer information to parents through our website and through a number of free publications covering a range of subjects from general pregnancy health to our latest guide 'Having a Premature Baby', also funded by the Asda Foundation. We further produce a range of books for health professionals, such as

'Talking About Smoking in Pregnancy', aimed at health care professionals working with pregnant teenagers. All of Tommy's guides can be ordered free from <http://www.tommys.org/store>.

Our press department is there to give journalists the latest and most accurate information on the issues surrounding our cause. Luckily the media has a big appetite for pregnancy-related stories and we've often used broadcast and print media to communicate specific messages encouraging women to prioritise their health during pregnancy.

We also work very closely with midwives, obstetricians, dieticians and pregnancy specialists in areas such as diet, nutrition, exercise and smoking cessation.

But it is through investment in medical research that we believe we can best improve things. We have three research centres, each focusing their effort on different problems in pregnancy and together forming the largest specialist research team in Europe.

WHICH ARE THE THREE RESEARCH CENTRES?

The clinical research programme at our London centre at St Thomas's Hospital focuses on the screening for, treatment of and prevention of pre-eclampsia and premature birth. In particular, Tommy's researchers are playing a large part in a worldwide effort to introduce a routine screening test for these problems to identify women at high risk; such an intervention has the potential to dramatically improve pregnancy outcome. Tommy's London centre also established the first clinic in the UK that focuses on the care of women who are at increased risk of preterm labour, providing them with the specialist care they need.

The Tommy's Manchester Centre specialises in examining the role of the baby's life support system, the placenta. In 2009, the Manchester team opened the UK's first clinic to focus on the placenta, in order to improve monitoring of women whose pregnancies are affected

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by placental problems. In 2011, the Centre launched its new Stillbirth Research Programme with funding from Tommy's.

In Edinburgh, Tommy's research team specialises in alleviating the risks of obesity in pregnancy. In August 2008, the centre opened the Tommy's Antenatal Metabolic Clinic, which is now providing specialised care to around 200 obese pregnant women each year, and the clinic has become a template for similar clinics around the UK.

WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR FUNDING?

We are supported by individuals across the UK taking part in sponsored events and making regular donations, as well as Trusts and Foundations. Many organisations, such as Asda and Bounty (the UK Parenting Club), also support Tommy's work.

WHAT'S YOUR BIGGEST WORRY?

Our biggest worry is complacency and a lack of awareness on the part of the public. Even today, parents experiencing the loss of their baby are sometimes told "it's nature's way", "you can always try again" or "well at least you've already got a child". All of these comments would be totally unacceptable to say to parents who have just lost an older son or daughter, but are somehow still acceptable after losing a baby. We want to make more people aware of the devastation such loss causes to families' lives and the need to improve pregnancy care and outcomes.

WHAT'S BEEN YOUR BIGGEST TRIUMPH OVER THE YEARS?

It's 21 years since our foundation, and we're now starting to see a greater understanding of what goes wrong in pregnancy, good progress towards improved early diagnosis and more effective treatments, particularly for preterm birth and late miscarriage. We're particularly proud that all our research centres run specialist clinics where patients can take part in research projects, benefit from the latest research knowledge and receive expert support. Women are referred to these clinics from far and wide because of the care they receive there.

WHAT ARE YOUR MOST EXCITING PLANS OR BIGGEST HOPES FOR THE FUTURE?

Our long-term mission is to halve the number of babies that die during pregnancy or birth by the year 2030. Currently, as a step towards this, we are

very excited about developing further our 5 Point Pregnancy Plan, which we launched in 2011, to provide even more support for mums-to-be around some very important health areas, difficult topics to discuss with both health professionals and mums, and for which current interventions are often non-existent or not evidence-based.

The 5 Point Pregnancy Plan is based on our knowledge that approximately half of all women of child-bearing age are either overweight or obese, that in some low-income groups as many as 29% of women smoke during pregnancy, and that 10–15% of all women suffer depression or anxiety while pregnant. So the 5 Point Pregnancy Plan (<http://www.tommys.org/fivepointpregnancyplan>) encourages women to address issues around nutrition, weight, exercise, smoking and mental health. We aim to give women practical tools to make small changes to their lifestyle and so have a big impact on the success of their pregnancy.

HOW CAN PEOPLE CONTACT YOU?

See the Further Information box below for details of the ways in which interested journal readers can contact Tommy's.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Who:	Tommy's
Where:	Head Office, Nicholas House, 3 Laurence Pountney Hill, London EC4R 0BB, UK. Our offices are open on weekdays from 9.00am to 5.00pm.
Enquiries:	Tel: +44 (0)207 398 3400. E-mail: mailbox@tommys.org
Website:	http://www.tommys.org
Midwives:	Tommy's PregnancyLine. Tel: 0800 0147 800. E-mail: midwife@tommys.org
Press office:	Tel: +44 (0)207 398 3448. E-mail: tommypressoffice@tommys.org
Twitter:	@tommys_baby
Facebook:	http://www.facebook.com/tommysthebabycharity

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Editor's note This article is one in a series of occasional articles on key health organisations worldwide. The Journal would be pleased to hear from other organisations, particularly those based outside the UK, that would like to be similarly profiled.

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