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Introduction

Science and medicine is developing at phenomenal speed. It is possible to detect chromosomal anomalies such as Down syndrome and Patau syndrome in early embryos through preimplantation genetic screening (PGS). Experts have identified ectopic pregnancy as one of the leading contributions to maternal mortality and have implemented measures in which to minimise risk. There is also greater information available to patients regarding common issues such as pelvic organ prolapse (POP) which affects up to 1 in 3 women. This Expert Guide highlights the aforementioned developments whilst also discussing other industry concerns such as addressing communication and language barriers for non-English speaking pregnant women in the UK and egg donation law using Israel as a case study.

Aside from industry trends there are also plenty of health concerns facing professionals within the obstetrics and gynaecology profession. In 2016, environmental fears, obesity studies and new diagnosis methods dominated the field, and birth rates have continued to drop to new record levels. Birth rates in the UK stayed the same from 2015 to 2016 at 1.89 births per woman, but international birth rates have continued to slow overall, following the trend since the birth rate highs of the early 1990s. Even birth rates in countries with traditionally high figures such as India and Bangladesh are lower too.

Links to chemicals in the air, water, food and products in the western world have been linked to neurodevelopment disorders in children for the first time, in a Project TENDR study. Although a worrying study, it also highlights some of the ways that these issues can be reduced. Research this year also showed that obesity in mothers can affect the genetic pre-dispositions of generations of children towards being obese themselves. Although only proved in mice offspring, scientists believe a similar trend is likely to be observed in humans as well. Russian researchers this year have created a urine-based test that can help detect preeclampsia in women, allowing for an earlier diagnosis which can lead to less impact on the child.

Also this year, concerns over the Zika virus (which if contracted during pregnancy, can cause microcephaly and other brain malformations), were loud and fearful. An outbreak in the Americas, with the first non-travelling (did not contract it whilst on holiday) North American case confirmed in February 2016, has led to precautions being advised for pregnant women and sexually active males in higher risk areas. The virus is also being discussed in relation to the 2016 Summer Olympics held in Brazil's Rio de Janeiro. The University of Utah will be conducting a study on exposure and contraction rates amongst the nearly 1,000 strong team travelling to the high risk area.

