Stillbirth Summit 2017: Takeaways

What an incredible privilege it was for several of us from the NY Metro Chapter to attend June's Stillbirth Summit. The Summit is hosted every few years by Star Legacy Foundation to bring together the world's leading researchers on stillbirth with families of stillborn babies and medical professionals (including several from our area - pictured above! - who were sponsored by our chapter). We were absolutely blown away by the passion and dedication of the researchers and medical professionals in attendance, all of whom are pioneers and renowned experts in their fields.

From cord issues and sleep studies to prevention strategies and bereavement support, we were so impressed with every single presenter's expertise and, most importantly, their eagerness to share their knowledge with their colleagues and garner feedback to further the impact of their work.

We learned so much about so many different topics. Some highlights:

- It is of critical importance for expectant moms to know what's normal for *your* baby's movement (not just an arbitrary "10 kicks in X amount of time"). We actually watched video of a pregnant belly moving, and even the experts all counted a different number of "kicks." Instead, we need to know our individual baby's schedule, patterns, and "quality" of movement, and see a doctor immediately if there is any change in frequency, strength, or type of movement (including decreased OR increased/"wild" movements), as any of these can be a sign of a baby in distress.

- There is no biological basis for how having a sugary or cold drink could possibly cause a baby in utero to move, as the placenta does not permit the transmission of temperature differences or sugar. This popular advice is NOT a sound substitute for medical attention; NEVER waste time doing this if you are concerned about your baby's wellbeing - just go straight to the hospital.

- Physicians need to listen to a pregnant mother's intuition about the wellbeing of her unborn baby, just as pediatricians have found it invaluable to listen to a mother's intuition about her infant. The majority of loss moms (and even many grandmas!) report having a feeling that something was wrong well before finding out their baby was in trouble.

- There have now been several published studies confirming that the risk of stillbirth in the third trimester is greatly increased for mothers who sleep on their back as opposed to their side. Sleeping on the side (especially the left) improves bloodflow to the baby, and can make a significant difference for a baby who is struggling - and since unfortunately we don't always know yet who those babies are, side sleep is best for everyone!

- In many international countries, it is becoming standard practice to prescribe regular doses of aspirin in certain pregnancies to support placental function (of course, only under the supervision of a doctor!).
Only 10% of medical students get any training in how to break bad news to patients. There is a program called Breaking Bad News which seeks to remedy this oversight to better support families who lose a baby.

- The stillbirth advocacy organization Tommy's in the UK is doing a public service campaign to encourage expectant moms to pay attention to their baby's movement and seek medical attention if they have any concerns about their baby. #alwaysask

- Parents of stillborn babies have a big voice in driving the research to determine causes and prevention of stillbirths! Much of the research done for the last STARS study came out of suggestions from parents, and at the end of the last session led by Dr. Jane Warland and Susanne Pullen, we were asked to upload the questions we still had about our stillbirths to the Summit app so that the researchers could consider what else they should look into during the next STARS study. Your experiences are valuable - speak up!

Overall, we were elated to see that there are so many smart, driven people who are working so hard to find answers for all of us who have lost a child to stillbirth and to stop this horrific tragedy from happening to others. We all left the Summit feeling even more excited and honored to be a part of Star Legacy Foundation and this fantastic community of people!

If you’re interested in learning more about any of the above, please reach out to us and we will point you toward the latest resources!

Also check out SLF Executive Director Lindsey Wimmer’s reflections on the 2017 Stillbirth Summit here!
The booklet also debunks common myths such as “babies slow down at the end of pregnancy” and “drink something cold and sugary to get your baby moving” - NOT TRUE!

If you are expecting or know anyone who is, we strongly encourage you to read and share this booklet! Get your FREE copy in PDF or print today!

New Chapter Chair --
We are thrilled to introduce Christine Chang as our new Medical Co-Chair! Welcome Christine!!

New Yoga & Meditation Retreat --
Congrats to chapter member Kristin Ferriggi who recently hosted a yoga & meditation mini-retreat to benefit Star Legacy, raising over $4200!

Your Help Needed!
If you haven't already, please take a moment to review Star Legacy Foundation at Great Nonprofits. Our 5-star rating is incredibly important toward qualifying for grants to continue our life-saving work!

Star Legacy is Growing!
Did you know that there are several new chapters already in operation (red dots above) and many more (yellow) in formation? Learn more at starlegacyfoundation.org/chapters!

Want to Get Involved?
Our chapter is growing, too! If you’d like to get more involved, we have volunteer opportunities available in several areas: Peer Companions (training session coming soon!), 5K event planning, hospital/partner outreach, legislation efforts, and more. Please email us if you're interested in pitching in, and keep an eye out for an email coming soon to chapter members about an upcoming Chapter Social planned for October (details TBA)!

Best wishes,
Hilary, Samantha, Theresa, Amanda, Eleni, Christine & Bobbie

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