BORN TOO SMALL - WHO SURVIVES IN THE PUBLIC HOSPITALS IN LILONGWE, MALAWI?

AK Ahlsén¹,²,³, N. Kafumba¹, E. Spong⁵, F. Kamwendo⁴, K. Wolff²

¹. Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Kamuzu Central Hospital, Lilongwe, Malawi
². Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Södertälje Hospital, Södertälje, Sweden
³. Department of International Collaborations, Oslo University Hospital, Oslo, Norway
⁴. Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Queen Elisabeth Central Hospital, Blantyre, Malawi
⁵. Motala Hospital, Motala, Sweden

Background: Malawi has the highest preterm birth rate in the world. The survival of these babies is not known. The main objective of this study was to demonstrate the short-term survival of infants with birth weight below 2500g in Bwaila Hospital (BH), a district hospital and the tertiary level Kamuzu Central Hospital in Lilongwe. The specific objectives were to calculate birth weight specific survival rates; to compare the two hospitals regarding the chances of survival and to review the use of antenatal corticosteroids.

Methods and findings: 1496 babies were included prospectively in the study between June and November 2012. Survival was defined as discharge from the nursery or postnatal ward. The survival rate for ELBW (<1000g) was 7%; for VLBW (1000-1499g) 52% and for LBW (1500-2500g) 90%. There was a marked increase in survival from 1100g. Survival was significantly higher in KCH for babies weighing below 1200g and higher in BH for babies above 2000g. A majority of deaths occurred within the first 4 days of life. Only 98 of the babies had a mother who had received antenatal corticosteroids.

Conclusion: With the current resources, efforts should be focused on preventing early neonatal deaths in LBW infants above 1100g. The coverage of antenatal steroids for mothers at risk of preterm delivery can be improved. Further studies are needed on the quality of the obstetric and neonatal care at the hospitals and how to reduce the high rate of preterm birth in Malawi.