

TORONTO EARLY FETAL ULTRASOUND CENTRE THE FIRST OF ITS KIND

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

TORONTO, October 20, 2008 – A new service at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre is striving to ensure that pregnant women have the option to detect possible fetal problems earlier in their pregnancy.

The Toronto Centre for Early Fetal Ultrasound at the Perinatal and Gynaecology Department of Sunnybrook is the first of its kind in Canada performing early stage fetal targeted ultrasound examination in order to detect potential fetal conditions such as structural anomalies – which are complications that may occur with the development of the fetal skull, brain, spine, abdominal wall, limbs, stomach and bladder – and to also detect chromosomal disorders, such as Down's syndrome.

"Our aim is to get ultrasounds for pregnant women done sooner, so that women have more possibilities and testing options," says Dr. Ori Nevo, a Maternal Fetal Medicine specialist and lead physician at Sunnybrook's Toronto Centre for Early Fetal Ultrasound. "We have the same equipment as everyone else, but the performance and interpretation of the scan requires a different level of expertise that we can offer at an earlier stage in a woman's pregnancy."

Congenital anomalies, which are defects present in a baby since birth, are relatively common, occurring in two to three per cent of low-risk pregnancies. In Canada, the first targeted ultrasound for detection of anomalies is traditionally performed at 18-20 weeks. The Toronto Centre for Early Fetal Ultrasound performs ultrasound screening six to eight weeks earlier, at 12-15 weeks.

Using conventional ultrasound equipment, such as the transvaginal ultrasound, the centre provides pregnant women with greater information about their fetus early in their pregnancy. This unique service is available in other regions of the world, but is the first of its kind in Canada.

"The women we are seeing are either at risk for fetal anomalies or are obese, and in that case, the later ultrasound may be of limited resolution," says Dr. Nevo, who is also an assistant professor in Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the University of Toronto. "However, ideally, any pregnant woman would benefit from early fetal ultrasound examination."

Ayelet Lahat, 28, of Toronto, who visited the Centre recently, went directly to Dr. Nevo for her second pregnancy's ultrasound screening after she was referred to Dr. Nevo for ultrasound during her first pregnancy by her doctor in Israel.

"I knew everything would be fine, because I'm an optimistic person," Ms. Lahat says. "I feel more comfortable now, knowing that everything really is okay. It is so important to catch issues early, especially in a pregnancy. The Toronto Centre for Early Fetal Ultrasound has experienced and trained professionals and I knew I would be in good hands."

Currently, Dr. Nevo is the lead and only physician performing ultrasound scans within the Toronto Centre for Early Fetal Ultrasound. Until construction of Sunnybrook's new Perinatal & Gynaecology unit is completed in 2010, the Centre's services are located at 76 Grenville Street, Toronto, Ontario.

Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre is inventing the future of health care for the 1 million patients the hospital cares for each year through the dedication of its more than 10,000 staff and volunteers. An internationally recognized leader in research and education and a full affiliation with the University of Toronto distinguishes Sunnybrook as one of Canada's premier academic health sciences centres. Sunnybrook specializes in caring for Canada's war veterans, high-risk pregnancies, critically-ill newborns, adults and the elderly, and treating and preventing cancer,

cardiovascular disease, neurological disorders, orthopaedic and arthritic conditions and traumatic injuries.

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