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Transvaginal Ultrasound Imaging for Assessment of Early Pregnancy

Sir

Public concerns regarding the misdiagnosis of miscarriage ¹ have identified a serious weakness in the provision of quality care to women in early pregnancy. The implementation of a clinical initiative to standardise care during early pregnancy ² is a welcome response to these tragic outcomes. While all imaging modalities have technical limitations, the current controversy over the erroneous diagnosis of miscarriage highlights the fact that standards of ultrasound training need improvement ³. Abdominal "external" ultrasonography can be sensitive for diagnosing presence or absence of a gestational sac, but compared to transvaginal "internal" sonography, it is less sensitive at detecting a fetal pole. But a transvaginal sonogram can still render an incorrect diagnosis of miscarriage, if faulty equipment is used.

Specialist units offering IVF and other advanced reproductive treatments throughout Ireland evaluate early pregnancy with transvaginal sonography every day (Figure 1). Proper use of transvaginal sonography to document embryonic heart rate is a highly accurate method to confirm early pregnancy viability ⁴. We encourage the HSE and the Department of Health & Children to incorporate supplementary training in this key imaging modality, and to ensure that all obstetrics facilities in Ireland have the funding necessary to maintain the equipment required to offer this important service.

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