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A Rare Congenital Disorder: Amniotic Band Syndrome

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Perspective

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DESCRIPTION

When a developing foetus becomes tangled in loose tissue bands in the uterus, it develops Amniotic Band Syndrome (ABS). The bands stop blood from reaching the fetus's internal organs. ABS may cause fatal birth defects or other severe birth defects. Amniotic Band Syndrome (ABS) is a rare congenital disorder that affects roughly one in every 1,200 to 15,000 live births. Though the exact causes of ABS are not known, research suggests that fibrous bands that form within the amniotic sac can entangle the foetus and restrict blood flow, leading to a range of malformations and deformities. Despite its rarity, ABS can have a significant impact on the lives of those affected by it and it is time for the medical community to pay more attention to this condition. One of the challenges in addressing ABS is that it can present in a wide range of severities, making it difficult to diagnose and treat. In some cases, individuals with ABS may exhibit only mild cosmetic defects, such as missing fingers or toes, while others may experience limb amputations, cleft lip or palate. Because of this variability, it is important for healthcare providers to be knowledgeable about ABS and to conduct thorough evaluations when they suspect this condition.

Causes

The exact cause of ABS is unknown, but it is believed to be related to disruptions in fetal development. The developing foetus is surrounded and safeguarded by the amniotic sac, a membrane filled with fluid. In some cases, the sac may rupture or tear, leading to the formation of fibrous bands that can entangle fetal body parts. These bands can cause malformations by constricting blood flow and preventing normal development.

Symptoms

ABS can affect any part of the body, but most commonly the hands, feet, fingers, or toes. Symptoms may vary widely depending on the severity of the condition. Mild cases may only present as cosmetic defects, such as missing or fused fingers or toes. More severe cases can lead to limb amputations, clubfoot, cleft lip or palate, or even stillbirth.

Diagnosis

ABS is usually diagnosed through prenatal ultrasound, which can detect the presence of fibrous bands or other abnormalities in the developing fetus. In some cases, a fetal MRI may be necessary to provide a more detailed image of the affected body part. After birth, a physical examination can confirm the diagnosis and assess the severity of the condition.

Treatment

Treatment options for ABS depend on the severity of the condition and may include surgery, prosthetics, or physical therapy. Mild cases may not require treatment, while more severe cases may require surgery to remove fibrous bands, correct malformations, or amputate affected limbs. Prosthetics and physical therapy can also help improve mobility and function in affected body parts.

Surgery may be necessary to treat conditions including webbing, cleft lip and palate, club feet. Children or infants with shortened or missing limbs may benefit from prostheses (artificial body parts). They can use the prosthetic and enhance their overall function with the help of physical and occupational therapy. Rarely, a doctor may do surgery to remove amniotic bands while the fetus is still inside uterus. The delivering parent and fetus both face significant health risks as a result of this process.