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LETTER TO EDITOR

Re: Perinatal Mortality Rate as a Quality Indicator of Healthcare in Al-Dakhiliyah Region, Oman

رد: معدّل وفيات ما حول الولادة كمؤشر على جودة الرعاية الصحية في محافظة الداخلية في سلطنة عمان

Sir,

With reference to the interesting study published in the SQUMJ November 2013 issue by Santosh *et al*.,[1] I presume that consanguinity is closely linked to the preponderance of congenital anomalies (53.50%) and prematurity with its complications (23.56%) which are the leading causes of early neonatal deaths in their studied cohort. My assumption is based on the following evidence. First, the practice of consanguineous marriage has been the culturally-preferred form of marriage in Oman as more than half (52%) of the total marriages in Oman are consanguineous.[2] First cousin unions are the most common type of consanguineous unions, constituting 39% of all marriages and 75% of all consanguineous marriages.[2] Second, it is well-known that consanguineous couples have a higher risk of having children with congenital malformations than non-related couples. The consanguinity rate of 76% was reported among Omani births with major malformations.[3] Third, infants of consanguineous parents has been shown to have a statistically significant 1.6-fold net increased risk of being born at less than 33 weeks' gestation compared with infants of unrelated parents.[4] Fourth, consanguinity has been noticed to significantly increase pregnancy loss and birth weight of <2,500 g.[5] Accordingly, I presume that the continuing popularity of consanguineous marriage might have an important negative impact on the many effective measures suggested by Santosh *et al*. to reduce the perinatal mortality rate in Oman.[1]

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