WOMEN'S HEALTH ASSOCIATES

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To whom it may concern,

I am writing in support of universal screening for hepatitis B at admission to labor and delivery units for delivery in Mississippi. In healthcare there is constant tension to provide the best care and contain ever rising cost. How we make those choices speaks to our priorities. I believe that investing in the health and safety of our newborns should be our priority. We have seen an increase in syphilis nationwide and this has hit Mississippi hard, and we responded by screening for syphilis 3 times during each pregnancy, at onset of prenatal care, at 28 weeks and then at admission for delivery. We also have seen increase HBV prevalence in our child-bearing age population. 10 other states mandate screening for hepatitis B surface antigen at delivery admission and currently we do not. The same potential for prenatal exposure to syphilis exists for hepatitis B and if undiagnosed perinatal HBV transmission can lead to chronic infection in up to 90% of exposed infants. These children experience lifelong risks of liver disease, cirrhosis and cancer.

If we screen and intervene with targeted newborn prophylaxis (vaccine+HBIG) we can reduce transmission by >85%. The cost of the test is low, CMS lists $10.33. Currently with bundled reimbursement this would be an additional cost to delivering hospitals.

In a world where we value PPE personal protective equipment and universal precautions for all healthcare providers it is imperative to speak up for the voiceless and defenseless that will be our future. For less than the cost of the surgical gown and gloves used at delivery to protect us we can protect the baby from this dreadful disease.

My mother had a liver transplant when her liver failed, and I saw firsthand the burden of liver disease. She lived 15 years longer than she would have and I am grateful for those years but the thought of a child walking that path when we have the means to prevent it leads me to this plea for us to find a better way.

Please invest in healthy babies and a better Mississippi by mandating admission screening for HBV on labor and delivery units. An ounce of prevention truly is worth more than a pound of cure. The average baby born in Mississippi weighs a little over 7 pounds.

Respectfully,

David Waddell, MD FACOG

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