Stephanie Lawson - Mod 5B

PICO: In adult women, is pelvic floor muscle training during pregnancy more effective than no training in reducing the prevalence of urinary incontinence?

Stress urinary incontinence (SUI) is one of the most common forms of urinary incontinence, especially in postnatal women, with prevalence up to 34%.1 The number one risk factor for development of urinary stress incontinence is pregnancy, and it is caused by injury to pelvic floor muscles (PFM) during childbirth as well as weak pelvic floor muscles.1,2,3 It has been postulated whether women can decrease the effects of SUI while pregnant. Several studies have shown PFM exercises (PFME) to reduce symptoms, but little is known about their success in prevention of stress incontinence.6 This literature review examines the effects of PFM training on urinary incontinence during pregnancy compared to standard care.

In implementing the PFME programs, physical therapists confirmed that the women knew how to perform PFM contractions correctly. Education by a physical therapist about pelvic floor anatomy was also included to increase knowledge and awareness of the body to these women as well as what they were working toward improving. The NICE guidelines for the management for urinary incontinence in women suggests eight contractions performed three times a day.5

Throughout these articles, reductions in prevalence, episodes, or frequency of SUI along with a decrease in volume of leakage were found. Symptoms of SUI as well as decreased perception of severity of SUI were also reported. Increases were seen in PFM strength as well. Unfortunately, the degree of statistical significance varied from article to article. Even though these articles displayed a wide range of results, they were not conflicting in nature. In comparison, all the results support the conclusion that some form of a PFME program can in fact have an impact on SUI during pregnancy and postpartum. Thus, women need to know the benefits that physical therapy can have on this issue as well as the education a well informed Physical Therapist can provide on PFM contraction technique in order to increase PFM strength and decrease prevalence of SUI.