

History of the Iowa Statewide Perinatal Care Program

The Iowa Statewide Perinatal Care Program was developed by Dr. Herman Hein in 1973. Initially, he formed a perinatal team consisting of an obstetric nurse, a neonatal nurse, and himself, a pediatrician-neonatologist. An obstetrician consultant was available to the team but did not travel with the team at that time. Since then, an obstetrician has become a regular member of the traveling team and a perinatal nutritionist has been added as well.

The team initially visited all hospitals in Iowa that provided maternity services. Through these personal contacts naturally occurring referral patterns were observed and became the basis for the development of perinatal referral centers throughout the state. When the program began in 1973 there were 141 hospitals providing maternity services, now the number fluctuates in the low 80's.

The perinatal referral centers were developed in Iowa's largest and medium sized communities so that no patient would have an excessive distance to travel to receive quality perinatal health care. When necessary, the patients were evaluated and referred to a higher level of care within this cooperative system. The system allows patients to receive the best care available as close to their homes as possible. The Iowa Statewide Perinatal Care Program has served the state well and the neonatal mortality rates are among the best in the nation. Iowa's smallest hospitals (those delivering fewer than 100 babies/year) have neonatal mortality rates as low as 0.6/1000 lives births. It is unlikely that this number is equaled anywhere else in the world among hospitals of this size; there are currently 31 such hospitals in the state of Iowa.