

Advances in the Treatment of Tubal Pregnancies

Joseph Kahn, M.D.

The modern treatment of tubal pregnancies is a good example of a major advance in medical care. The story also illustrates how the care you receive at Kaiser is both advanced and first rate.

Tubal pregnancies are not very common. They occur in about one in fifty pregnancies. What happens in a tubal pregnancy is that instead of the pregnancy being located inside of the uterus, it ends up in one of the fallopian tubes. In this location, as the fetus grows, it will stretch and sometimes rupture through the tube. This can cause serious internal bleeding. The sooner we diagnose the condition, the better the chance of a successful treatment to prevent serious consequences to the patient.

In 1975, when I began my training in Obstetrics and Gynecology at Kaiser hospital in San Francisco, a patient who had the bad luck to have a tubal pregnancy was most often experiencing a serious event. Typically, the patient had had some irregular spotting along with pelvic discomfort for a few weeks, and this culminated in the sudden onset of severe abdominal pain and of feeling faint. To take care of this patient, we needed to proceed with major surgery immediately. In addition, blood transfusions were often needed.

A few years later, some pioneering work was done at Kaiser to modernize the surgical treatment of this condition. Two Kaiser colleagues and I had a paper published in the Obstetrics and Gynecology literature demonstrating a better method of treating this condition. We had provided 15 patients with a safer surgical technique called laparoscopy, which allowed a quicker and less painful recovery from surgery.

For the past few years, we at Kaiser have had extensive experience in treating tubal pregnancies with a single injection of a drug called Methotrexate. This medicine usually cures the condition without the need for surgery. The key to being able to use this modern treatment is to be diagnosed early.

So, if you are pregnant and experience any bleeding, call for advice, and we will evaluate your pregnancy. Ideally, your pregnancy will be found to be normal. But if not, the sooner we evaluate you, the better your options for treatment will be.