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## A ray of hope for expectant mothers

**Sudha Nambudiri****First Published : 01 Feb 2010 12:43:00 AM IST**

KOCHI: Cancer is a life threatening disease and the delay in treating it reduces the likelihood of a successful cure. Whether a woman is pregnant or not the treatment is usually the same. Some of the usual treatments (surgery, chemotherapy drugs and radiation therapy) may harm the foetus. So most women and even doctors consider abortion the safer option. But treatments can sometimes be timed so that there is no risk to the foetus.

Oncologists' say that certain cancers detected in the early stages of pregnancy can be treated without terminating the pregnancy.

According to a four-year study done at the gynaecology department of the Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences, malignancy detected in the head and neck can be treated without affecting the foetus. "There is hope for such

women. We treated a woman who had a cancerous growth in the brain which was in the early stage. The treatment was done without terminating pregnancy," said Dr Anupama R, assistant professor, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, AIMS, who did the study from 2006-2009.

Her paper on cancer therapy during pregnancy won the best paper award at the All India Conference of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists at Guwahati last week. "There is a risk if it is breast cancer as the treatment could make the foetus vulnerable," she says. Very often doctors have conflicting interests as the most appropriate and timely treatment for the mother may not be in the best interest of the foetus.

The standing principle is that procedures that do not interfere with the reproductive tract are well tolerated by both mother and foetus. "Our goals are clear - treat the curable malignant disease in the pregnant woman, protect the mother and foetus from the possible harmful effects of cancer and its treatment and retain the mother's reproductive system intact," she said.

This is probably one of the few centres which has separate data of pregnant women with cancer.

Though there is a lot more to be done, the study is a ray of hope for many whose life is caught between the yearning for a healthy child and a cure from cancer.

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