



# IN THE NEWS

## ***Stillbirth and other pregnancy complications: predicting who's at risk***

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Dr Lucy Higgins, of the Maternal and Fetal Research Centre at the University of Manchester, has been awarded a Research Training Fellowship by children's charity Action Medical Research to research stillbirth.

Around 4,000 babies are stillborn each year in the UK. Dr Higgins is looking for a way to identify these babies during pregnancy so they can get early help.

In her research Dr Higgins is taking her lead from the fact that many women who suffer a stillbirth say their baby moved around less than usual in the hours or days before they experienced their tragic loss.

She is looking for a way to predict whether a baby is at risk if its mother notices it has stopped moving around as much as usual in the womb. Dr Higgins explains: "If our new tests could identify which babies are likely to go on to be stillborn, born prematurely, or stop growing properly, then we'd have a vital window of opportunity. Those babies could be monitored closely during the rest of the pregnancy and, if they seem in danger, they could be delivered early."

Two possible tests are being investigated: analysis of blood samples from the mother and ultrasound scans to check the health of the placenta. Around 300 pregnant women are taking part in her study.

The Research Training Fellowship of £133,955 was awarded by Action Medical Research to the high-flying young doctor to carry out this key piece of research and undertake training to develop her research expertise. The charity's scheme has been running for 40 years and supports promising doctors and researchers early in their careers and develops future leaders in children's research.

Medical research can save and change children's lives. Yet surprisingly, medical research into conditions that devastate children's lives is poorly funded.

"It is always a privilege to be involved in a woman's journey through pregnancy, when extremes of human emotion can be experienced – from the elation of a healthy birth to the devastation of bereavement through stillbirth. Knowing that my work could make the journey through pregnancy safer for babies is absolutely fantastic."

Over the past 40 years, Action Medical Research has funded 164 fellowships at a total value of over £11 million (almost £17 million in today's terms). Some of today's leading lights in children's research and medicine were once Research Training Fellows funded by Action, including: Professors Bobby Gaspar, Andrew Pollard, and Donald Peebles.

As well as supporting Research Training Fellowships, Action Medical Research also awards individual project grants. The charity is currently funding research into conditions including Down syndrome, premature birth, epilepsy, meningitis and rare diseases.

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Action Medical Research is a UK-wide charity saving and changing children's lives through medical research.