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Transcript:

AMA President, Dr Michael Gannon, ABC Radio 'PM'
 Friday 2 March 2018

Subject:

Healthy weight gain during pregnancy

LINDA MOTTRAM: New guidelines for the care of pregnant women recommend a greater focus on weight. Growing numbers of expectant mothers in Australia are presenting as overweight or obese and excessive weight gain during pregnancy can put the health of both mothers and babies at risk. Sarah Sedghi reports.

REPORTER: Melinda Street is expecting a baby this year and is in her second trimester. Her midwife has spoken to her about healthy weight gain during pregnancy, but it's advice she wishes she received sooner.

MELINDA STREET: It was eventually something that was discussed with me, but because of my country origin the GP that I was originally seeing until 13 weeks didn't actually mention anything with me. At about 16, 17 weeks the midwife that I started seeing actually finally said something, but by then the first trimester was over and I'd gained more than recommended.

REPORTER: Conversations with expectant mums about healthy weight gain, diet, and exercise during pregnancy are being encouraged in the latest national guidelines on pregnancy care. They were announced today by the federal Health Minister Greg Hunt. They also suggest weight should be monitored during pregnancy. Australian Medical Association President Dr Michael Gannon, is an obstetrician and welcomes the guidelines.

MICHAEL GANNON: We know that there is a linear relationship between worse outcomes for mother and baby with level of increased weight at conception and with the amount of weight gain during pregnancy, so we welcome attention on this issue.

REPORTER: Current guidelines provide information on healthy weight gain during pregnancy for women depending on their body mass index, but an increasing number of women are starting their pregnancies already overweight or obese, according to a study published last month in the Medical Journal of Australia.

TERRI-LEE BARRETT: We do know that in Australia we do have an increasing problem with obesity, so there will be more women who are entering pregnancy who are sitting outside of that normal weight, healthy BMI range.

REPORTER: Terri-Lee Barrett is the president of the Australian College of Midwives and a midwife herself. She says being overweight or obese when pregnant and gaining too much weight during pregnancy, can pose many risks to both mothers and babies.

TERRI-LEE BARRETT: There is an increased risk of diabetes and there is an increased risk of hypertension, and they obviously then have a flow-on effect to the outcomes in terms of the baby's wellbeing. Should the mother develop complications during her pregnancy, they flow onto the baby. So if the mother does develop diabetes, the baby may well be larger. That

can go on to give you problems actually with the birth process. The babies have trouble with stable blood sugars after they're born.

Mothers who develop high blood pressure, related to perhaps their being overweight, puts them at a higher risk group for developing hypertension. Those babies don't grow so well; the placenta doesn't get the blood-flow that it needs, so those babies can be poorly growing.

So there are a range of complications, both for the mother and the baby, that mean that a mother's weight really does impact on pregnancy outcomes.

LINDA MOTTRAM: Terri-Lee Barrett is president of the Australian College of Midwives; Sarah Sedghi our reporter.

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