Key notes on: Obstetric haemorrhage

- Obstetric haemorrhage is a leading cause of maternal mortality and morbidity – in Australia it is the leading cause of ICU admission
- The lack of close post-birth monitoring and the failure to act on signs and symptoms that a woman is seriously unwell, remain important contributors to maternal death from haemorrhage
- Active management of the third stage reduces the likelihood of postpartum haemorrhage and is recommended for all women
- Estimated blood loss (EBL) is virtually always under-estimated when bleeding is severe – consider the clinical picture – treat the woman, rather than base treatment on EBL – try to quantify blood loss
- Assess and act on signs/symptoms that deviate from normal – i.e. routinely assess the fundus (on presentation to ED, following birth, including post-caesarean); persistent, unrelieved pain requires further investigation; vital sign changes are a late sign
- Request senior medical involvement early
- Plan and practice massive obstetric haemorrhage drills – as a team – may not be able to predict who will have a massive haemorrhage, but you can plan for it
- Be aware of how many and where O-neg blood units are stored at your hospital
- Crystalloid as good as anything whilst waiting for blood
- All maternity hospitals should have a massive transfusion protocol – with maternity adaptations and suitable to the context of the service
  - Consider early trigger of massive transfusion protocol; keep fibrinogen > 2g/L; avoid permissive hypotension if uterus in-situ
- Need to avoid hypothermia, acidosis, hypoperfusion, hypoxaemia – if you want the uterus to respond to uterotonics and the clotting system to optimally function
- Remember the woman’s partner – often ‘put in a waiting room and forgotten’
- Remember ‘normal postpartum care’ – e.g. anti-D if woman is a negative blood group with a positive baby
- Offer debriefing and discussion about what happened after the woman has recovered (not while she is still sick)

Key resources/recommended reading


Youtube video on insertion of a Bakri balloon: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lRNxLFB8Vqw


