

diabetes) and exogenous substances ingested or inhaled by the mother.

The teratogenic effect of drugs is not believed to have an effect on developing tissue until day 15 of gestation, when tissue differentiation begins to take place. Before that time, drugs usually have little effect because they are believed to have an insignificant affinity for undifferentiated tissue. Also, until implantation takes place, at approximately 7 days after conception, the embryo is not exposed to maternal blood that contains the drug. However, some drugs may affect the uterine lining, making it unsuitable for implantation. Drugs administered between days 15 and 90 may produce an effect if the tissue for which the drug has an affinity is in the process of differentiation at that time. After 90 days, when differentiation is complete, most fetal tissues are believed to be relatively resistant to teratogenic effects of drugs. However, the impact on ongoing neurologic development is not known.

Nursing Care Management

Expectant mothers are cautioned against ingesting any medication without first consulting a practitioner. To help ensure that fewer women will inadvertently take some chemical that might be harmful to their fetuses, labels on medications are now required to include information regarding the possible teratogenic effects of each drug. All women of childbearing age should be educated regarding the effects of chemicals, especially alcohol, on unborn fetuses. FAS is an irreversible condition but is completely preventable. The March of Dimes^{*} and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention[†] have information about prevention tips, and the Genetic Alliance[‡] has information about support groups for families of children with FAS. Genetic counseling is recommended for women who have a concern about a possible teratogen during pregnancy.

Nursing Alert

One drug recognized for its carcinogenic effect is diethylstilbestrol. Large doses of this hormone, given to pregnant women in the United States between 1938 and 1971 to prevent abortion, caused adenocarcinoma of the vagina in a significant proportion of the