We Are Performing Too Many C-Sections

In the United States 1 in 3 births end in a cesarean section (C-section). The rate of ‘low risk’ or elective C-sections, where no obvious peril exits to the mother or baby, is now over 1 in 5.

Chart of C-section increases

One paper published by the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) states the situation this way

“…one in three women who gave birth in the United States did so by cesarean delivery. Cesarean birth can be life-saving for the fetus, the mother, or both in certain cases. However, the rapid increase in cesarean birth rates from 1996 to 2011 without clear evidence of concomitant decreases in maternal or neonatal morbidity or mortality raises significant concern that cesarean delivery is overused.”

It is worthwhile to review the data behind this ACOG statement. Over the same time-period referenced above maternal mortality rates (MMR-deaths of mothers) has doubled and neonatality mortality rates (NMR-deaths of babies) has dropped over 30%.

Rates in mortality changes chart

NMR is the rate of deaths of infants in the first month of life, *which is not solely dependent on the birthing process*. Because NMR is much higher than MMR the net reduction is quite positive in how many fewer lives are lost.

Mortality rates

An important question to ask is; how dangerous is birth to the mother and infant if left to purely natural devices? The answer to this question should directly inform the rate of C-sections. One way to answer this question is to look at MMR and NMR worldwide. Cultural differences exist that allow for the observation of a natural ‘baseline’ where access to medical care is largely unavailable. The following maps show MMR and NMR by country around the world.

World Maps