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News

## New International Survey Results Demonstrate a Significant Need for Information and Support for Mothers of Premature Infants

*New data prompts a call to action on World Prematurity Day for greater education on associated risks and support for mothers of premature infants*

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[MONTREAL, November 17, 2011] — On the first World Prematurity Day on 17 November 2011, a global survey of 1,300 mothers and mothers-to-be reveals the need to increase the level of information on premature birth and its associated risks to new and prospective mothers. The global survey results also reveal the impact of premature birth on mothers who are burdened by worry for their child(ren)'s future and complications in their development. The survey was sponsored by Abbott, a global healthcare company and was conducted in 13 countries including Canada. It gathered responses from 1,300 parents of premature infants and full-term infants, as well as prospective parents. The primary focus was to assess the understanding and awareness about prematurity in general, and the burden of premature birth and its associated risks.

Complications of prematurity are the number one cause of death for babies during the first month of life. Mothers and mothers-to-be, however, showed a low awareness of the extent of prematurity and all the associated risks for premature babies. Over two thirds of those surveyed did not know the incidence of premature birth, and 42% of mothers underestimated the level to be far below the actual 10% incidence rate.<sup>1</sup>

The findings of the survey highlight the emotional pressures experienced by mothers of premature babies. About half of all mothers felt stressed upon giving birth, but those who had had premature infants experienced significantly more anxiety, guilt, fear and powerlessness compared to mothers of full-term infants. The survey also showed that 42% of mothers with premature babies are concerned about the long-term health complications, and 36% believe that their children will fall behind in physical development. Their concern extends beyond health concerns; 1 in 4 mothers (24%) believe prematurity will mean that their children will fail to achieve at the same level as other children at school.

“Although we have come a long way in looking after premature infants, these findings reflect what we hear from parents after they have been discharged from the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit,” explained Dr. Leonora Hendson, Director of the Neonatal and Infant Follow-up Clinic at the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital in Edmonton. “Survival of premature babies, even those at the margins of viability, has improved remarkably over the decades. Now we provide state of the art medical care for babies in the NICUs. There is ongoing research to improve outcomes. Unfortunately, parents of preemie babies are often not systematically supported in the transition back into the community, nor are programs or educational opportunities readily available to all children from the NICU. Parents are worried and want information that will help them to manage the risks and ensure their children are happy and healthy.”

Katharina Staub, an Edmonton mother of twins born at 27 weeks, describes how stressful her experience was. “I had no idea that I was at risk of having my children early. Now I know, that being an older mother and expecting more than one child increases the risk of prematurity. I was not aware of this before our children were born. It just wasn’t something my doctor discussed with me,” said Staub. “I was in denial when we ended up in the neonatal unit, with my twins in incubators. The experience was difficult. Rather than being a joyful event, the birth of your children becomes something filled with worry and guilt...”

The survey revealed that mothers of premature babies rely on physicians as one of their main sources of information. These mothers also demonstrated their need for additional support once they were discharged from the hospital, with half of mothers wanting more information on the risks associated with preterm births, additional medical care and more follow-up from the physician or nurse for their child. The survey showed that mothers should be better informed of key health risks for both premature and full term babies. For example, at least 32% of women are unaware of the high risk season for respiratory infection in their country, a time when premature infants are most in danger of a potentially serious respiratory infection. This is of particular importance for mothers of premature babies, as the results showed that twice as many premature babies had contracted a respiratory infection compared to full-term babies. Furthermore, 40% of mothers with premature babies were not aware of simple preventative measures that can be taken to protect their child against respiratory infection.

Silke Mader, Executive Board Chairwoman, European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants, comments, “As many as 1 in 10 babies are born prematurely and it is vital that access to information and support for prospective and new parents is stepped up. On this day – the first ever World Prematurity Awareness Day – we are encouraging greater awareness, access to information, and emotional support for pregnant women and mothers of premature babies. This is the beginning of a long journey to raise awareness of prematurity and its risks.”

### **About World Prematurity Day**

The first World Prematurity Day, previously known as Prematurity Awareness Day, is taking place on 17 November 2011. It is an initiative of the European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants (EFCNI), March of Dimes, National Premmie Foundation and LittleBigSouls.

### **About Abbott**

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### **References**

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization (WHO): The worldwide incidence of preterm birth: a systematic review of maternal mortality and morbidity. Available <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/88/11/08-062554-table-T3.html>. Accessed September 2011.