Approves Working While Pregnant

©1977, Chicago Sun-Times

CHICAGO, Dec. 3 — Most pregnant working women can stay on the job safely until they go into labor, a new federal government report says. However, it recommends that physicians be made aware of possible work place hazards so that they can advise pregnant women correctly.

Some pregnant workers may expose themselves unwittingly to work hazards that can endanger their babies' lives, the report warns.

The document, made public recently, was prepared by the Chicago-based American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists under contract to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. The medical group cautioned that the report was intended for doctors, not the general public.

Nonetheless, the document contains a set of precautions that women can be urged to take if they have potentially hazardous jobs. The report also urges some modifications in the working environment to take pregnancy into account.

Among these is a recommendation that pregnant women be moved away from heavy concentrations of chemicals in the air, because pregnant women breathe more rapidly than others.

In general, however, the report says that most women can continue to work while they are pregnant.

"The normal woman with an uncomplicated pregnancy . . . in a job that presents no greater potential hazards than those encountered in normal daily life . . . may continue to work until the onset of labor and may resume working several weeks after an uncomplicated delivery," the document says.

Among the hazards that it says pregnant working women should be protected from are:

— Infectious agents of many kinds, including them commonly found in hospitals and bacteriology laboratories.

— Waste anesthetic gases usually plentiful in the air in hospital operating rooms.

— Trace amounts of a wide variety of heavy metals, including mercury, lead and cadmium.

— Dangerous organic chemicals such as PCBs. The report concludes that working women exposed to PCBs should be discouraged from breast-feeding if the doctor concludes their milk may have been contaminated.

— Extreme heat and humidity.

— Smoking and even casual exposure to cigarette smoke.

Although most women can continue to work, the report says that the work place may have to be modified for pregnant women.

They should be permitted to change from the sitting to standing position frequently to relieve stress on their backs.

MONS 000882