



Christian Voices for Life

Weekly Pro-Life

Education

Prayer

Action

Hospitals are Deciding Life and Death



Education: If a baby is born alive at 20 or 21 weeks gestation, there is no expectation of survival, and only comfort care would be given. If a child is born at 23 weeks or more, they are sent to the NICU for intensive treatment to help them survive. Premature babies have an increased risk of cerebral palsy, mental retardation, vision and hearing problems, and learning disabilities.(1) But some survive with only minor problems.

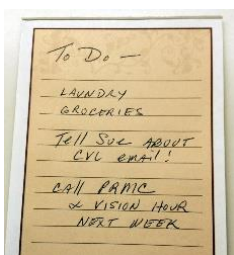
Between 21 and 24 weeks there is a high probability that the baby will either die or be severely handicapped, and some doctors on that basis would discourage even attempting to treat the child, even encouraging parents at risk to agree before the birth even occurs.(2) But who should decide? Many hospitals have policies to only offer treatment after 22 weeks, or 22 weeks 5 days, etc. But age is only one factor – weight is another important factor, and giving the mother steroid shots before a 22 week birth can also help. Research published in 2015 showed that when babies born at 22 weeks were given active assistance, 23% survived and 15% survived without severe impairment. (3) Survival rates have continued to improve. (2) Informed consent is a primary principal of medicine, but how can a parent be truly informed if the doctor refused to even examine a child unless he has reached a certain age?

Sarah Kil went to the hospital at 21 ½ weeks, because she was bleeding. She was told the hospital would not treat her baby until 23 weeks. But she found out that another hospital not far away would treat at 22 weeks, so at 22 weeks, she transferred there and was given steroid shots. She gave birth 2 days later. Her son required eye surgery and glasses, but is now a healthy 2 year old. (4)

1. http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/461571_2
2. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6027110/>
3. <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa1410689>
4. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/16/parenting/baby/extremely-premature-infants.html>



Prayer: Dear Father God, please be with parents of very premature infants, and console them with your presence and love. Help them to trust in you and do all they can to help their precious child survive and thrive. Give wisdom and discernment to doctors and other medical professionals involved in the care of these tiny babies. Help everyone involved value every life and not to place less value on the life of a child who may be handicapped. Please allow every child with a chance to survive be given the medical help they need. Help medical science to continue to improve our ability to care for these very young babies.



Action: If you know a pregnant woman who might be at risk for a premature birth, talk to her about the fact that very premature babies are not in every case given all possible help to survive. Encourage them to make it clear to their doctor that they want their child to be treated and given every chance to survive, even if there is a significant chance of the child having serious health problems throughout their life. Different hospitals have different guidelines, so the parents should look for a hospital that will give very premature babies the best chance to receive treatment.