The Importance of Vital Records and Statistics for the Obstetrician–Gynecologist

ABSTRACT: Information from vital records is critical to identify and quantify health-related issues and to measure progress toward quality improvement and public health goals. In particular, maternal and infant mortality serve as important indicators of the nation’s health, thereby influencing policy development, funding of programs and research, and measures of health care quality. Accurate and timely documentation of births and deaths is essential to high-quality vital statistics. This Committee Opinion describes the process by which births, maternal deaths, and fetal deaths are registered; the challenges faced with a decentralized reporting system; and the important role for obstetrician–gynecologists in improving the accuracy, reliability, and timeliness of vital records.

Recommendations

Obstetrician–gynecologists play an essential role in ensuring accurate representation of pregnancy-related and pregnancy-associated deaths and other vital statistics for policy makers, public health institutions, and researchers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (the College) recommends that obstetrician–gynecologists

- become well-informed of state and local regulations regarding medical certifications for deaths and registration of births.
- ensure prompt documentation of vital events (ie, births and maternal and fetal deaths) in the medical record by appropriate personnel, using definitions from the College and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- advocate for sufficient funding to modernize and standardize the vital statistics system in the United States.
- support inclusion of “intended place of birth” on birth certificates to better assess extramural birth outcomes.
- support training for everyone involved in vital records collection (eg, birth attendants, birth clerks, hospital administrators).