

# Perinatologists improve odds for safe birth

By Shirlee Rose Iden  
staff writer

About half the time when premature babies are born, there is no advance warning.

"About 7 percent of all babies are born early," said Dr. William Michaels, whose specialty is maternal fetal medicine or perinatology.

His responsibility is to care for pregnant women, often those at high risk, up to delivery and through the first 28 days of life.

One of the newer medical specialties, perinatology deals with the management and treatment of the unborn child. In the United States today, there are about 350-400 perinatologists.

"In Michigan there are about a dozen of us," Michaels said.

Michaels office, where he also practices obstetrics and gynecology is at Providence Hospital. "I enjoy caring for patients, but I also enjoy teaching and clinic research. There's no time for this in private practice."

Michaels is also seriously determined to keep abreast of new developments in his field.

Born in New York City, he came to Michigan at age 9. After doing his undergraduate work at the University of Michigan, he attended medical school in Chicago. "I met Sherry Whitefield at Michigan, and married her," he said. The couple have a son, Eric, 12, and a daughter, Elizabeth, 10.

BUT MICHAELS has many more children than that. Their smiling faces at birth and later ages grace his office walls as does a sign "Stop Smoking During Pregnancy, because you Love your Baby."

Despite the sign, the doctor hasn't been successful at kicking the habit himself.

A resident of West Bloomfield, Michaels did his residency at Sinai Hospital, has taken training at Ford, and put his practice on hold to take fellowship training in perinatology at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

"I came back as a specialist in June 1982," he said.

Michaels says there is just no way of knowing when a premature birth is imminent. But there are specifics that make certain mothers high risk.

These include those who previously delivered prematurely, women with diabetes, lupus or high blood pressure and women of advanced age for childbirth.

"I see a lot of women 35 years and older," he said. "My approach is different from an Ob-Gyn. They manage the obstetrics. I may have to manage the insulin or other specific problems."

"My patients don't need another specialist. The most important thing I do is give my patients more time."

"I SEE these women up to once a week during the pregnancy and may see them 30 times or more depending on the problem. It's important to reduce anxiety for the patient."

Michaels contends that in an ideal world, a perinatologist has a small practice of Ob-Gyn and the rest of the time treats the difficult cases.

"Prenatal mortality has improved in the last few years because of the reduction of traumatic births," he said. "A simple vaginal delivery is still safer for the mother than a Cesarean section."

Michaels cites the newest diagnostic tools such as amniocentesis and ultra-

**Dr. William Michaels contends that perinatologists, specialists who work in fetal medicine caring for mothers and their unborn and newly born infants, make a difference in today's statistics for high-risk mothers. From his Providence Hospital office, he monitors those with diabetes, hypertension, advanced age and many other complications.**



sound as vital to the field. "The technical aspects have made us expert in fetal diagnosis and improved the ability to care for the unborn child."

"Our best understanding is that ultra sound is safe in pregnancy, though it should not be used in every pregnancy," he said.

"The problem is that doctors' training in doing the ultra sound is very uneven, but insurance companies don't discriminate."

MICHAELS argues that the intent of perinatology is not to compete with other specialists but to enlighten and provide knowledge.

"Perinatologists require support," he said. "What we do costs money but insurance companies don't recognize the sub-specialty or high risk pregnancies."

They don't differentiate the fees. Patients who could not ordinarily afford his care can come to a clinic he runs at Providence, and most important, he believes is that perinatologists in their expertise have the ability to look for trouble. "In earlier times there were not fetal monitors and other advances hadn't been made."

One recent patient, a brittle diabetic past age 35, had already lost a baby, and was referred to Michaels.

"We worked diligently and she gave birth to a lovely baby boy. She writes me notes from time to time," he said. "People come to me for a last chance, but there's no magic, it's hard work for the patient."

"Some diabetics who need a fine adjustment of their insulin have to see me

**'Perinatologists require support. What we do costs money, but insurance companies don't recognize the sub-specialty or high risk pregnancies.'**

— Dr. William Michaels

twice a week and make phone calls to me every evening."

Another patient who had seen seven other doctors, came to Michaels crying. SHE AND her husband were both unemployed, she was at an advanced age, had hypertension, kidney stones and gall stones.

"I found she had hyperparathyroidism and eventually found a tumor in her parathyroid. We do make a difference, but insurance companies won't pay for pre-natal consultations."

Michaels says he never regretted the day he left his practice to retrain as a perinatologist.

"But the bottom line is that people need more and you want to give more. It frustrates because the institutions necessary don't change fast enough."

Tracy Cato looks over her 2-year old son, Roman, who weighed less than two pounds at birth. The child is in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Providence Hospital and doing fine.



HOMES  
THERE'S A LOT GOING ON IN  
Observer & Eccentric  
classified ads

Learn CPR.  
American Red Cross  
Together, we can change things.

**SILHOUETTE SNIPPETS**

10 A.M. TO 5 P.M., THURSDAY THROUGH SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 1-3 AND MONDAY, NOVEMBER 5, BIRMINGHAM

Capture your child's profile in a treasureable silhouette art form by Sally Newcomb. Frame it...and you have a unique gift idea for grandparents, special friends and relatives. Mounted on quality art paper, the silhouette will be cherished for years to come. Head silhouette, 8.50, full figure, \$17. Sittings will be taken by appointment. For reservations call 644-6900, ext. 324.

**Jacobson's**  
Children's Store

We welcome Jacobson's Charge Card or The American Express® Card.

We are now open until 6 on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday. Thursday and Friday until 9.

**SUIT CLEARANCE**

A SELECTED GROUP OF CURRENT SEASON STYLES - \$108 to \$228.

The best time to purchase that suit you have been wanting is right now. See our selection of pure wool and wool/polyester blend designs... a collection that ranges from simple career tailoring to menswear styles and suits that can go from day into evening with a change of blouse and accessories. Navy, grey, black, red and other colors. Misses sizes 4 to 20.

130 units in stock

**Jacobson's**  
Birmingham

We welcome Jacobson's Charge Card or The American Express® Card.

We are now open until 6 on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday. Thursday and Friday until 9.