KZN's first pinhole surgery baby is born

The baby boy whose life was saved by groundbreaking pinhole surgery performed on him while still in his mother’s womb, was born at the Netcare Umhlanga Hospital on Tuesday.

Hayden and Tarryn Ford of uMhlanga with miracle baby Joel

The baby boy whose life was saved by groundbreaking pinhole surgery performed on him while still in his mother's womb, was born at the Netcare Umhlanga Hospital on Tuesday.

The baby, named Joel Hayden Ford, who was operated on when his mother was 31 weeks pregnant, was delivered via caesarean section at 38 weeks. According to the doctors involved in his delivery, he is "strong and healthy" and entered the world weighing 3,32 kilograms.

The pinhole surgery, which involved the insertion of a shunt to drain fluid that had been building up in the foetus' chest, was performed at Netcare Parklands Hospital in Durban early in June by a team of specialists. It was the first time the life saving procedure has been undertaken in KwaZulu-Natal and possibly in the country, according to foetal specialist, Dr Ismail Bhorat.

Hayden and Tarryn Ford of uMhlanga said they were delighted at the birth of their third child. Hayden, a former Netcare 911 paramedic, said that until now babies with hydrothorax, as the condition is known, had a very poor prognosis. "Thanks to the outstanding doctors and the latest in medical technology and techniques we are able to celebrate the birth of our third child," he added. "We are very grateful to everyone who was involved in caring for Tarryn and our miracle baby."

According to Dr Bhorat, who practices at Netcare Umhlanga Hospital, hydrothorax involves the build-up of fluid between the layers of tissue that line the lungs and chest. The condition occurs in approximately one in 15,000 foetuses. The build-up of fluid places pressure on the baby's chest cavity and can cause breathing problems and prevent the heart from pumping properly.

"The condition inhibits the growth of the baby's lungs and often causes cardiac failure, which leads to intrauterine demise," he adds. "Indeed, no fewer than 90% of babies who develop the condition, die before birth. The medical team therefore had no hesitation in recommending the surgery to the Ford family."

He says the pinhole surgery performed on the foetus was a complete success and allowed the baby's lungs to expand immediately. The foetus' heart, which before the surgery was displaced by the weight of the fluid, also quickly returned to its correct position.

"Hydrothorax is a very rare condition and yet, remarkably, we diagnosed two cases within just days of one another," he observes. "We also surgically intervened on another foetus of 24 weeks, just six days after we operated on Joel. This operation was even more difficult as the foetus was smaller, but it was also a success and the foetus is now 31 weeks."

SA - the Good News