

Labor & Delivery: Nurse Faulted For Fundal Pressure, Shoulder Dystocia.

The mother was admitted to the hospital at thirty-eight weeks. Pitocin was given during the first eight hours of labor. The mother started pushing and the head became visible. Then the baby's head retracted back into the birth canal, an indication of shoulder dystocia.

The obstetrician took steps to dislodge the shoulder while the labor and delivery nurse continued to apply fundal pressure, application of force with the hands on the fundus of the uterus - the mother's upper abdomen - to push the fetus down the birth canal in an effort to accomplish delivery.

Shortly after birth the infant was diagnosed with Erb's Palsy, a paralysis of the left arm, wrist and hand due to injury to the nerves of the brachial plexus.

In the mother's lawsuit the Court of Appeals of Texas ruled the mother's expert witness correctly stated the standard of care for the labor and delivery nurses:

Once a shoulder dystocia occurs, the nurse should not apply fundal pressure.

The inappropriate use of fundal pressure by the nurse during a shoulder dystocia and the force involved in such a maneuver causes the shoulder to be further impacted against the mother's pubic bone. This greater impaction actually stretches the brachial plexus nerves as the shoulder has nowhere to go. Fundal pressure risks stretching, tearing or avulsing the nerves which come from the spinal cord and causing impaired function of the arm, shoulder and hand as occurred in this case.

The medical literature also associates more brachial plexus nerve injuries with the use of fundal pressure during shoulder dystocia.

*Given that [the baby] experienced a severe shoulder dystocia during delivery with several maneuvers used to deliver the baby along with simultaneous inappropriate use of fundal pressure, more likely than not, in reasonable medical probability, the use of fundal pressure during the shoulder dystocia caused the baby's brachial plexus injuries. **Reedy v. Pompa**, __ S.W. 3d __, 2010 WL 1010049 (Tex. App., March 18, 2010).*