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Objectives of obstetrical data collection

As in other fields, computerized clinical data collection has become very "fashionable" also in obstetrics. Although many attempts and projects have been started, the major objective of these data banks is not always apparent.

Although the presented list may not be complete, the information obtained from obstetrical data banks should serve the following purposes:

- To provide data for the departmental statistics and to allow easy preparation of an annual report.
- To provide data for clinical studies by looking for a correlation between various parameters in the patient's social or medical history or during the course of a pregnancy and various maternal or neonatal outcome measures.
- Hospital based data banks provide the material to establish a quality assessment system for a particular institution.
- Data from several hospitals should be pooled on a regional or national level to establish a regional or national data bank or data-pooling can be accomplished by linking of individual data banks.
- These data banks provide epidemiological data that could be the basis for important decisions concerning health policies and for international comparison.

The success of any data collection system depends entirely on the compliance of the people who are involved in the recording of the appropriate information and transmission from the chart into a data bank. The compliance of doctors, nurses or midwives is closely related to the amount of data to be recorded for each individual patient and also with the apparent usefulness of these data. Therefore, any system to collect significant and reliable statistical data on a regional or national level, can only succeed if there is a conscientious restriction to the most important and most significant data. A more detailed data collection may be performed on a prospective basis in the context of clinical studies. The continuous data storage in a computerized bank should only serve to provide important statistical information on a departmental, regional or national level, and for the assessment of epidemiological information. They should also serve as indicators to retrieve cases which need evaluation in the context of quality assurance.

This overall objective for a computerized clinical data base must be kept in mind, when the data selection for coding and storage in the data bank is done.