Ethical issues in Obstetrics and Gynaecology

Introduction to the ethics component of your O&G Block

During your time spent on the Obstetrics and Gynaecology unit we would like you to be thinking about the range of ethical issues that arise in this specialty. Some of these issues will be common to all medical and surgical specialties, for example consent and confidentiality, although the context of O&G may give rise to particular dilemmas relating to these issues that are less likely to be encountered in other specialties. Other ethical issues may be more specific to the specialty, for example issues relating to assisted conception, pre-natal diagnosis, and termination of pregnancy. The practice of Obstetrics raises interesting questions about the nature of a duty of care when the interests of both mother and baby are of concern to the doctor.

You will have one ethics session during your Block which will take place in either week four or five. In this session we will be discussing ethical issues that you have identified during your time so far in the Department as well as more general ethical and legal issues relating to Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

Your assignment in preparation for the session

You will need to get together in groups of two clinical pairs (four in a group) and decide between you on a case or issue to discuss in the session. This should be based on what you have observed during your time on the attachment. There are often debates about ethical issues in relation to O&G in the media but for this assignment the presentation should have arisen out of your experience in practice rather than something that you have read about.

During the session each group will be asked to briefly (in 5 minutes) present their case or issue and outline what they see as the main ethical issues/questions. We will then have a general discussion of the ethical issues identified across the cases and approaches we can use to resolve the dilemmas raised. You will need to have thought carefully about the issues in your case beforehand and if necessary done some background reading, so that you can contribute to the discussion.

The session will conclude by considering some of the legal frameworks that govern the practice of Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

In this pack you will find:

- Some revision material on ethical frameworks that are relevant to health care (you will have covered this in your Values in Medicine module so it is revision).
- An overview of the law relating to abortion.
- An overview of the law relating to assisted conception.
- Some suggested reading and web links which you might find useful when thinking about your cases for presentation.