

# The missed early diagnosis of 'Siamese Twins' – Ethical Dilemma and Role of Family Physicians

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Figure 1:  
Conjoined twins after  
vaginal delivery at 22  
weeks 1 day gestation

A 25-year-old primigravida presents for Post Covid Assessment at 18 weeks gestation. During the assessment, ultrasound showed two fetuses with 2 arms, 2 legs, and 2 heads. The twins were joined at the thorax and upper abdomen. There was a single umbilical cord, and only one fetal heart was observed. A thoracophagus conjoined twin was diagnosed and referred to a Materno-Fetal Medicine Specialist. She had her early trimester scan done previously in a health clinic which showed a singleton fetus at 9 weeks of gestation. Diagnosis and prognosis were explained to both parents. Initially they were reluctant for termination of pregnancy due to cultural and religious beliefs. Subsequently, the parents agree to terminate the pregnancy. A stillborn female thoracophagus conjoined twins were delivered through spontaneous vaginal delivery weighing 750g at 21 weeks period of gestation. Lactation was suppressed and psychological support was given throughout the postnatal care.

## CASE PRESENTATION

## OVERVIEW



Conjoined Twins (CT) is a rare embryologic developmental accident of uncertain aetiology <sup>1</sup>



It has high rate of stillbirth and early neonatal death<sup>1,2</sup>



Early detection is crucial to avoid unnecessary surgical delivery and reduce psychological anguish to the expecting parents <sup>1</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Timely and proper prenatal diagnosis is crucial in avoiding psychological distress in parents

Ethical dilemmas on the continuation of pregnancy can arise and should be dealt wisely

Concerns of parents should be addressed when termination of pregnancy is considered



### References

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## DISCUSSION



### EARLY DIAGNOSIS DURING FIRST TRIMESTER IN PRIMARY CARE

- CT can mimic monochorionic monoamniotic twins fetuses
  - Window of opportunity in early trimester should not be missed<sup>2</sup>
- Sonographic feature suggesting conjoined twin<sup>1</sup>
  1. Twins are without dividing membrane
  2. Adherent body regions
  3. Inseparable trunks or heads without transpositions of fetal movements



Figure 2:  
Transabdominal ultrasound at 9 weeks of gestation without dividing membrane



### TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY (TOP) OF MALFORMED BABIES

- Ethical dilemmas arised between women's autonomy rights may conflict with fetus' right to personhood<sup>3</sup>
- Termination of pregnancy is often made if the twins shared vital organs

Doctors have legal and ethical obligations to provide an accurate antenatal diagnosis with full disclosure to enable informed decision making by parents<sup>3</sup>



### ROLE OF FAMILY PHYSICIAN POST TOP

- Bereavement and long-term post-abortion distress should be addressed
- Adequate lactation suppression and suitable contraception should be provided<sup>4</sup>

good communication skills and patient centered care are of paramount importance