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Paediatric and Obstetric Responses towards Prenatal Surgery for Lethal and Non-Lethal Conditions

The field of Fetal Medicine had its origins in the development of prenatal diagnosis using amniocentesis and karyotype testing in the 1960s.

Diagnostic capabilities became more sophisticated with the development of prenatal ultrasound in the 1980s. That decade also saw the first attempts at fetal surgery at University of California – San Francisco. Since then, fetal medicine centers have opened at dozens of centers around the world. Doctors and parents working in these centers face difficult choices. Often, after a prenatal diagnosis, the prognosis will be uncertain.

Then, surgeons, neonatologists and parents have to decide whether to terminate the pregnancy, attempt a fetal intervention, or continue to monitor the pregnancy. Choices have to be made after birth as well – choices between life-prolonging treatment or palliative care. I will present a few illustrative cases from our fetal medicine center, and then discuss surveys of different doctors showing how they view the choices that must be made.