



Twins thriving after hi-tech surgery before their birth



Derek Kershaw holding baby Ryan, and Margaret Kershaw with little Dylan

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By Patricia McDonagh

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THEY are now two little bundles of joy - but they nearly lost the fight to survive.

Thanks to a revolutionary procedure - the first of its kind to be performed in Ireland - doctors at Dublin's Rotunda Hospital saved the lives of Ryan and Dylan Kershaw. They performed surgery when they were only 22 weeks old - and still in the womb.

The tiny tots had been diagnosed with a life-threatening condition known as Twin-to-Twin-Transfusion Syndrome (TTTS) after a routine scan at 20 weeks. Abnormal blood vessels in the placenta the twins shared were giving too much blood to one baby and too little to the other.

With the help of surgical instruments measuring just a few millimetres and some lasers, the twins were saved.

"We used a radical new approach to surgery in pregnancy, which was developed in the United States", said Fergal Malone, consultant obstetrician at the Rotunda.

"It's named the fetoscopy and it means that a camera less than one-eighth of an inch thick is inserted through the pregnant mother's abdomen and into the womb.

"It was the first ever attempt to do it here. We had received the equipment in the middle of December and the in-utero fetal procedure took place on the 4th of January."

Excellent

Prof Malone said that, before the hospital got the equipment, the patient would have to be sent to the UK for treatment.

Of TTTS he said: "It's actually quite a common problem, which usually affects 20pc of all identical twin births, so it is excellent that we have the resources to deal with it now."

The twins' mother Margaret (35) was brought to the fetal operating theatre just a week after the diagnosis.

The fetal surgical equipment was placed in her womb while she was still awake. Laser instruments were then used to find the abnormal blood vessels in the placenta and fix them.

"We were pretty upset when we found out about the diagnosis," says Margaret, a native of Mallow, Co Cork who is now living in Clonsilla, Dublin.

"We had only been in for a regular scan and it was coming up to the New Year so that was quite hard to deal with. But the actual procedure was very good. All of the doctors were very supportive and it was over very quickly."

Margaret added: "It was my first pregnancy so myself and my husband were very upset the night before. But it was amazing that they could do this. We really didn't know if they would survive."

The twins, who weighed just 300 grams when they were operated on, were delivered by caesarean section at 33 weeks on March 28, weighing 2kg each. They spent a short while in the intensive-care unit.

Fantastically

Now, the four-month-old twins are doing "fantastically" and keeping their mother busy.

"Ryan was in intensive care for nine days and Dylan was in for 11, just because he was slow to feed," she said. "We are delighted with how healthy they are. We had a lovely christening for them. We can hardly tell them apart though, they are so alike."

- Patricia McDonagh