



Pregnancy in Surgical Fellowship: A team-based model of support

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Introduction

Pregnancy during surgical fellowship is a challenge to completing training requirements. Common concerns are:

- Reduced clinical and operative exposure
- Radiation safety
- Ability to meet case log minimums

With appropriate institutional support, pregnancy can be successfully integrated into fellowship training.

We present the experience of two surgical fellows who successfully completed fellowship with strong team support.

Methods

Study Design: A descriptive report of two surgical fellows in 1 year Advanced GI/Foregut Fellowship who became pregnant in consecutive years.

Data Source: Personal experience and review of operative case logs.

Training Requirements Evaluated	Team Support Assessed	Program Accommodations
Case log completion	Attending surgeons	Schedule flexibility
Clinical responsibilities	Scrub technicians	Radiation safety precautions
Call duties	Clinic and nursing staff	Ergonomic adjustments in OR

Results

Challenges	Program Adaptations	Outcomes
Physical demands of operating	Flexible case assignments	Maintained operative experience
Fatigue and physiologic changes	Ergonomic OR equipment adjustments Temperature control/cooling devices	Preserved surgical efficiency
Radiation exposure concerns	Radiation exposure minimized	Maternal and fetal safety maintained
Medical appointments	Duties coverage by co-fellow, attending	Appropriate prenatal medical care
Schedule constraints	Late 3rd trimester schedule adjustment Program extention, if needed	Education and case experience preserved
Postpartum recovery needs	Lactation breaks and fatigue breaks	Successful fellowship completion

Program Support Measures	
Support Strategy	Implementation
Attending surgeon flexibility	Encourage snack and bathroom breaks during cases * Have a sitting stool nearby * Wet cooling towel for neck * Cool OR temperature * Cold bucket with ice to soak hands
OR modifications	
Safety Protocols	Avoid fluoro and X-ray cases
Wellness accomodations	Lactation and fatigue breaks
Schedule flexibility	* Accomodate all medical appointments * Full maternity leave * Extention of training if needed

Program Outcomes	
Outcome	Result
Fellowship completion	2 / 2 fellows (100%)
Clinical competence	Achieved at graduation
Patient safety events	None reported
Education impact	Operative exposure maintained

Conclusion

- Pregnancy during fellowship is challenging but manageable with proper support.
- Fellows were able to fully meet operative and clinical requirements.
- Supportive program environment was key to success.
- Highlight areas for program improvement:
 - Consistent parental leave policies
 - Clear radiation safety guidance
 - Operative and clinical ergonomics
 - Personalized mentorship.
- Standardized policies can make pregnancy during surgical training achievable while maintaining high educational and patient care standards.

