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QuickTakes!

William Paterson Professor is Lead Researcher in an Infant Mortality Study that Proves State Mandated Screening Policies Reduce Infant Deaths

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William Paterson University health economics professor Rahi Abouk, PhD, is the lead author of a research study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association on December 5, 2017 that shows that state mandated screening policies are associated with a reduction in infant deaths resulting from critical congenital heart disease.

The study is titled “Association of U.S. State Implementation of Newborn Screening Policies for Critical Congenital Heart Disease (CCHD) with Early Infant Cardiac Deaths.”

“In this study, we show that a relatively simple screening test can save from 300 to 400 lives of newborns annually, says Dr. Abouk, assistant professor in the Cotsakos College of Business at William Paterson University. “This becomes even more important when we know the infant mortality rate in the U.S. is higher compared to other developed countries. Every year more than 20,000 newborns die in our country.”

Researchers set out to answer this question: Were mandatory state newborn screening policies for critical congenital heart disease using pulse oximetry associated with a decrease in infant cardiac deaths? Congenital heart disease accounted for 6 percent of U.S. infant deaths from 1999 to 2006. In 2011, critical congestive heart disease was added to the U.S. Recommended Uniform Screening Panel for newborns but until this study it was not known if the policy requiring screening for the most serious defects is associated with lower infant death rates.

In 2011, most states implemented policies recommending or requiring screening. As of August 9, 2016, 48 states had either enacted legislation or adopted regulations relating to pulse oximetry screening of newborns. New Jersey was one of the first states to require this screening in September 2011.

This is an observational study on infants between 2007 and 2013, which included approximately 27 million U.S. births. According to the results, there was a decrease in

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estimated infant cardiac death rates for states that implemented the mandatory screening policies compared to states that did not.

The researchers concluded that statewide implementation of mandatory policies for newborn screening for critical congenital heart disease was associated with a significant decrease in infant cardiac deaths between 2007 and 2013 compared with states without these policies.