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EXPERTS WARN AGAINST RELYING ON SMARTPHONE APPS TO AVOID STILLBIRTH

Maternal fetal medicine experts are sending an urgent warning to pregnant women not to rely on popular technology, such as smartphone apps, to avoid stillbirth, reminding them to always consult their doctor or midwife if in doubt about their unborn baby's health.

Dr Lucy Bowyer, Acting Head of Maternal Fetal Medicine at Sydney's Royal Hospital for Women, said the hospital had cared for a small number of women recently, with reduced fetal movements, who had relied on a smartphone app to assure them that their unborn baby's heart beat had been normal, but sadly had experienced stillbirth.

"Women with reduced fetal movements must ring for medical advice, not rely upon phone apps which cannot auscultate the fetal heart with any clinical success," Dr Bowyer said.

"It's such a tragedy to deliver a stillborn baby when urgent medical assessment and intervention may have prevented that loss."

The warning from the Royal Hospital for Women's Maternal Fetal Medicine department follows the increasing popularity of smartphone apps which claim to help users "keep track of each time your baby kicks" and "monitor your baby's health". While some focus on promoting bonding with the unborn child, others promote health monitoring as a feature of the app.

"Many women don't want to waste our time, but if you are concerned about your baby's movements, we would rather hear from you than take the risk of stillbirth," Dr Bowyer said.

"If you are concerned about your baby's movements, you must contact your midwife or doctor – at any time of the day or night.

"Decreased movements are a risk factor for stillbirth. Knowing what to do may be a problem for women whose first language is not English. These women should call or go to the hospital if they are worried."

To speak with Dr Bowyer, please contact Jennifer Connell on (02) 9382 4583 or 0418 205 992.