

Heads Up on Infant Mortality

Did you know that September is Infant Mortality Awareness Month? Probably not, there are so many pressing issues that are in the radar right now, one could easily be forgiven for not being 'aware'. Unfortunately though, it really is – and has been for a couple of years now – and here's why. Infant mortality is the measure of how we are faring as a nation, our youngest and most precious lives counted statistically as those born alive but dying before reaching age one. And yes, sadly, we are doing very poorly.

Infant Mortality Awareness Month passed as a resolution of the U.S. House of Representatives in 2006. Texas Congressman Michael Burgess who sponsored HR402 said, "Infant mortality rates are appalling." The U.S ranks near the top among industrialized nations; and African American babies have the highest rates at 13.5 per 1,000 live births compared with 5.7 per 1,000 live births for whites and Hispanics, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). The purpose of Infant Mortality Awareness Month was to increase national awareness of contributing factors, and to urge community leaders to assist in efforts to meet the objective of reducing the rate of infant mortality in this country by 2010.

Patients at my midwife-led *Easy Access* prenatal care clinic in Winter Garden have seen significant reductions in prematurity and low birth weight, a major factor in infant deaths. Our Campaign for Healthier Babies focuses on bonding mothers, fathers, families and communities to babies before they are born and this year we have been knitting baby hats to raise more awareness. My goal: simply knit one baby hat to represent every infant lost in Florida (**1689 babies in 2007**). Although lofty, we have collected 583 hats to date – each one hand-knitted or crocheted with love. Grandma's, neighbors, nurses and midwives in Florida and nationally have contributed hats as they have learned about the issues and felt moved to be involved. On September 26, 2009 all of our hats will be displayed at a local event in Clermont. Following that our hats will be donated to hospitals and to needy moms but our message will remain the same – our babies are dying, we can make a difference. Heads up!

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