

# Prize-winning presentation from the UoM OGSOC National Poster Presentation evening, 10 October 2017

## What role should fathers play in childbirth and pregnancy?

**C. Greaves**

*University of Birmingham*

*crg263@student.bham.ac.uk*

**Background** Paternal involvement in pregnancy and childbirth is an important consideration for healthcare professionals, but dealing with the roles and needs of expectant fathers is something that has gained little attention. Men feel pressure to attend the birth of their children without a clear idea as to what their role should be. There are three reasons why men may have a legitimate interest in attending their child's birth: their role as a maternal advocate, their position as an autonomous agent and as a responsible father. These reasons show a father's interest is legitimate, but fall short of fleshing out what his role is and what it ought to be.

**Methods** A qualitative empirical bioethics project was carried out, involving 15 semi-structured interviews and 22 participants. Interviews were transcribed and analysed according to qualitative and then empirical bioethics methodology.

**Results** The ethical theories of father as maternal advocate, maternal capacity and paternal consent were revised and new theories were generated.

**Conclusions** The role of a father as a neutral maternal advocate is more complex than previously defined. If a mother's wishes change during birth, it may be seen as permissible for the father to mediate and facilitate a compromise in decision-making between both sets of preferences. Expectant parents ought to be made aware of the fact that mothers may lack capacity during childbirth but fathers cannot legally consent on their behalf, and the



birth plan has no formal legal status. It may be morally permissible for the birth plan to gain equal status with an advance directive and for the father's consent to be analogous to that of a Lasting Power of Attorney, providing the mother autonomously deems this acceptable.