

Driving after Eclampsia.

Surgical Registrar Dr Zoe Barber contacted APEC when her driver's licence was suspended for six months after she suffered an eclamptic fit when she gave birth to twins.

We caught up with her to talk about what happened after the babies were born, the shock of losing her independence when her licence was revoked and how she helped change the DVLA rules on driving after suffering an eclamptic seizure.

After a straightforward pregnancy with no signs of pre-eclampsia, Zoe's twins were delivered at 36 weeks and 6 days, she describes the elective c-section as "the most wonderful experience" it was calm and controlled, the babies were put skin to skin straight away and there were no problems during the operation.

Zoe was reviewed in recovery by her midwife who was a bit concerned about the amount of blood she was losing, so she called the obstetric and anaesthetic teams to review her. The term "eclampsia" is thought to have come from the Greek meaning "like lightning", which Zoe says is the perfect term to describe what happened next; the severe headache came out of the blue like a thunderclap, "I felt like I'd been hit over the head, I could almost hear a 'crack' when it happened." Zoe was quickly taken back to the same operating theatre where her girls had been born, but this time it was completely different. There was no music, no smiles, and everyone was waiting for her. As she was being transferred back onto the operating table Zoe describes "seeing flashing lights" and the next thing that she remembers is opening her eyes to see her husband and staff crying tears of relief. She was on the High Dependency Unit after having an eclamptic seizure on the operating table. Hours had passed since her babies had been born, during that time her medical team had worked hard to stabilize her blood pressure and control the bleeding that can be a complication of pre-eclampsia.

After six days in hospital Zoe's blood pressure stabilized on oral medication, she and her husband took the girls home where they quickly got caught up the whirlwind of caring for two tiny babies. She was recovering well from surgery and life was getting back to normal. Zoe was keen to start driving again, and while she followed the DVLA's guidance on driving after a

caesarean section she hadn't thought about informing them about her eclampsia. She was aware that in the UK after a first provoked seizure the DVLA automatically revoked a person's licence for six months on medical grounds. However, she didn't know that even though eclampsia is a condition that can only occur in pregnancy, women who had experienced a seizure in pregnancy were placed in the same category as individuals who had suffered from other kinds of provoked seizure. Zoe duly contacted the DVLA who told her that she could continue to drive following her medical team's advice. She completed the forms that they requested, and was shocked when a few days later she received a letter telling her that her licence had been revoked for six months. This ban on driving was effective immediately, she wasn't able to drive, and as a mother of new twins this was a devastating loss of independence.

Zoe immediately contacted her healthcare provider, who shared a copy of the letter that she had written to the DVLA and helped Zoe use her medical training to conduct the first systematic review and meta-analysis into the medical literature on the risk of seizure reoccurrence. This review confirmed that there an extremely low incidence of recurrent seizures after eclampsia. Zoe submitted this evidence to Secretary of State's Medical Advisory Panel at the DVLA, and the rules were changed. The DVLA now considers eclampsia an exception in the provoked seizures category: (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/appendices-assessing-fitness-to-drive#history> (under the tab "show all updates").

Zoe Barber's driving licence was reinstated and she has now returned to work as a surgeon. She was fully debriefed by her consultant after she was discharged, but says it took at least 6 months for her to fully understand how unwell she had been, and that the trauma that her husband and family had experienced took even longer to process.

Eclamptic seizures are complication of pre-eclampsia that can, as in Zoe's case, occur after delivery of the baby. Women who have suffered eclampsia may suffer long-term psychological and physical consequences. Fortunately, Zoe's review of the literature shows that seizures are

unlikely to reoccur and the change to the DVLA rules is an important step in allowing eclamptic women to regain their independence after an extremely difficult time.