

Unborn Baby With Spina Bifida Undergoes Amazing Operation in the Womb to Repair Her Spine

by Steven Ertelt | London, England | LifeNews.com | 11/17/14

When their baby was 20 weeks along, doctors diagnosed Gina Beddoe and Dan Lavis's unborn baby daughter with spina bifida. Sadly a high percentage of babies diagnosed with the medical condition while in the womb become victims of abortion — but not little Frankie Lavis.

The couple said the thought of aborting her never crossed their minds and Beddoe read online about a new pioneering operation to repair baby Frankie's spine in the womb. The government-run health care program agreed to fund the surgery and the couple travelled to Belgium to one of four hospitals in the world offering the operation.

It took two hours and 22 surgical staff to close the gap in Frankie's spine and she was born in August at 35 weeks — and to her parents' delight she was moving and kicking her tiny legs in the air. It is too early to tell if Frankie is free of any signs of the condition but the fact she can move her legs means her nervous system is working.

'We didn't even have to ask each other whether we would continue with the pregnancy,' Mr Lavis said.

'We have very good support from friends and family and we felt we could cope with another child if she or he had extra needs,' added Ms Beddoe.



It was shortly after diagnosis that Ms Beddoe read online about a new operation to repair spina bifida while the baby is in the womb. She discovered that Dr Welch, a former president of the International Fetal Medicine and Surgery Society, had close links with Professor Jan Deprest at Leuven Teaching Hospital in Belgium.

Professor Deprest was one of the first surgeons to undertake the operation and leads one of only four centres in Europe that currently perform it.

At present, surgery to close the spinal column is usually carried out just after birth, by which time damage to the nerves may already be established.

Three years ago, a seminal U.S. trial of the new surgery, which was developed by surgeons at the Children's Hospital in Philadelphia where it has now been performed 200 times, showed it halved the rate of disability in spina bifida babies, compared with surgery after birth.

The report — published in the New England Journal of Medicine in 2011 — found that 40 per cent of babies operated on in utero needed a hydrocephalus shunt by the

time they were 12 months old, compared with 82 per cent of babies who had surgery after they were born.

Of the 64 babies in the trial who had the new surgery, 42 per cent were walking at 30 months compared with 21 per cent of the 70 babies who had surgery after birth.

Although closing the spinal cord will not repair nerve damage which has already occurred, it is thought to avoid further damage and prevent the build up of cerebrospinal fluid.

'The idea is that closing the spinal lesion in utero avoids secondary damage to the nerves and reverses the malformation,' says Dr Welch.

After counselling, the couple opted for the new operation.