

THE OBSTETRIC FORCEPS A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

رسالة

Essay
Submitted in Partial fulfilment of
Master Degree
in
Obstetrics and Gynaecology

شعبة الدراسات الجامعية
تم التصديق عليها
التاريخ: ١٢/١٠/١٩٩١

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1991



A c k n o w l e d g m e n t

I wish to thank Prof. Dr. Mohamed Farouk Fikry, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Ain Shams University, Faculty of Medicine, for all the time he devoted for reading and correcting the manuscript. His advise and support are deeply appreciated, without whose valuable supervision, this work, wouldn't come. His continuous encouragement and support were very helpful to complete this work in time.

I am indeed thankful to Dr. Sameh M. Abdel Hafez, Lecturer of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Faculty of Medicine, Ain Shams University, for his valuable suggestions and continuous help.

Hanaa Mohamed El-Sayed Ali,

1991



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HISTORY & EVOLUTION

HISTORY AND EVOLUTION

The obstetric forceps has a heritage that is one of the most interesting in the chronicles of medicine. Basically a simple tool, it has provoked more variations than any other instrument in current medical practice. Although some might believe that it has reached its ultimate form, there are continuing endeavors that will lead to better design, function, and safety, (Das, 1929).

The construction of the obstetric forceps will be best understood by tracing the various phases through which the instrument has passed in its evolution (Eden and Holland 1937).

The early medical literature contains a variety of passages describing attempts to resolve the problems of obstructed labour. The ancient Japanese attempted to extract a foetus with fillets of whale bone placed over the foetal head. Hindu writings long before the birth of Christ refer to a knife and a hook for perforation and extraction. This concept of mutilation persisted for

centuries and was described both by Hippocrates in 400 B.C. and by Soranus in the early second century A.D.

Only one of the great physicians of early times; Avicenna alluded to the possibility of an instrument that would extract the infant alive. He wrote that if manual traction is not successful, it should be followed by the use of the fillet. He added that should if the fillet is unsuccessful, "let the forceps be applied, and let it be delivered by them" Avicenna concluded with the significant statement that should forceps be unsuccessful, the infant must be withdrawn by incision "as in the case of a dead foetus", (Das, 1929).

The origin of the obstetric forceps dates from antiquity. There is evidence that an instrument used for delivery of the living child was known to the Ancient Romans. In the great medical work "Al Tasril" by Abul-Kasem El Zahrawi (Albucasis) an instrument is described and illustrated which greatly resembles the obstetric forceps, but being equipped with teeth was probably used by the Arabian physicians in the eleventh and twelfth centuries to extract the head of a dead foetus. (Manual of obstetrics by Foda et al., 1979), (Fig. 1).