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LONDON GRID FOR LEARNING

Woman gives birth to six babies, the first sextuplet births in the UK. 3/10/1968

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5 sextuplets fight for survival in incubators

Mrs Sheila Thorns in the new Birmingham Maternity Hospital. Picture by BBC Television

Birmingham, Wednesday.

Five of the six babies born in the new Birmingham Maternity Hospital today in the only recorded delivery of sextuplets in Britain this century were "extremely frail, but fairly satisfactory," last night. The sixth, a girl, died an hour after birth.

The babies, four girls and two boys, born two months prematurely and weighing between two and three pounds, were delivered in three minutes by a Caesarean operation which lasted an hour.

The mother, Mrs Sheila Ann Thorns, of Farlow Road, Northfield, Birmingham, who had the babies on her thirtieth birthday, had received a relatively new hormone treatment for infertility for three months before becoming pregnant. She is well and expected to remain in hospital for another three weeks.

Last night, the babies—named Ian, Roger, Lynne, Julie, and Susan—were all in incubators, where they are likely to remain for three weeks. They were being fed by tube with milk from the Human Milk Bureau at Sorrento Maternity Hospital, Moseley.

Hazardous outlook

Dr Ben Wood, a consultant paediatrician, said earlier that the babies were very frail and the outlook over the next few days would be extremely hazardous. It would be a week before doctors could give a definite view on their future.

Miss Dorothy Shotton, the consultant obstetrician, who led the operating team of 30—including seven anaesthetists, one for each baby and one for the mother—agreed that the picture would become clearer in a week. The mother understood the situation and would be happy if one or two of the babies survived.

The dosage of the fertility drug which had produced sextuplets was "either a bit too big or the mother was abnormally sensitive," Miss Shotton added.

Dr A. C. Crooke, who had treated Mrs Thorns for infertility at the Birmingham Hospital for Women, said yesterday that he would be guarding against multiple pregnancies in future. "We do not want people to have six babies at one time and I don't think people want them anyway. This case was the result of treatment." He referred to "a rash of multiple pregnancies"—including two sets of triplets.

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