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# The SUPPORT Project: reducing severe perineal trauma with the introduction of simple evidence based interventions

## Introduction

The Victorian perinatal services performance indicators published in 2021, identified our institution as an outlier with an elevated rate of severe perineal trauma (SPT). SPT, defined as third and fourth degree tear, occurred in 6.24% of patients compared to the Australian average of 3.55%.

## Aim

To reduce perineal trauma by 50% between September, 2019 to September, 2020- this timeframe was extended for six months secondary to COVID-19.

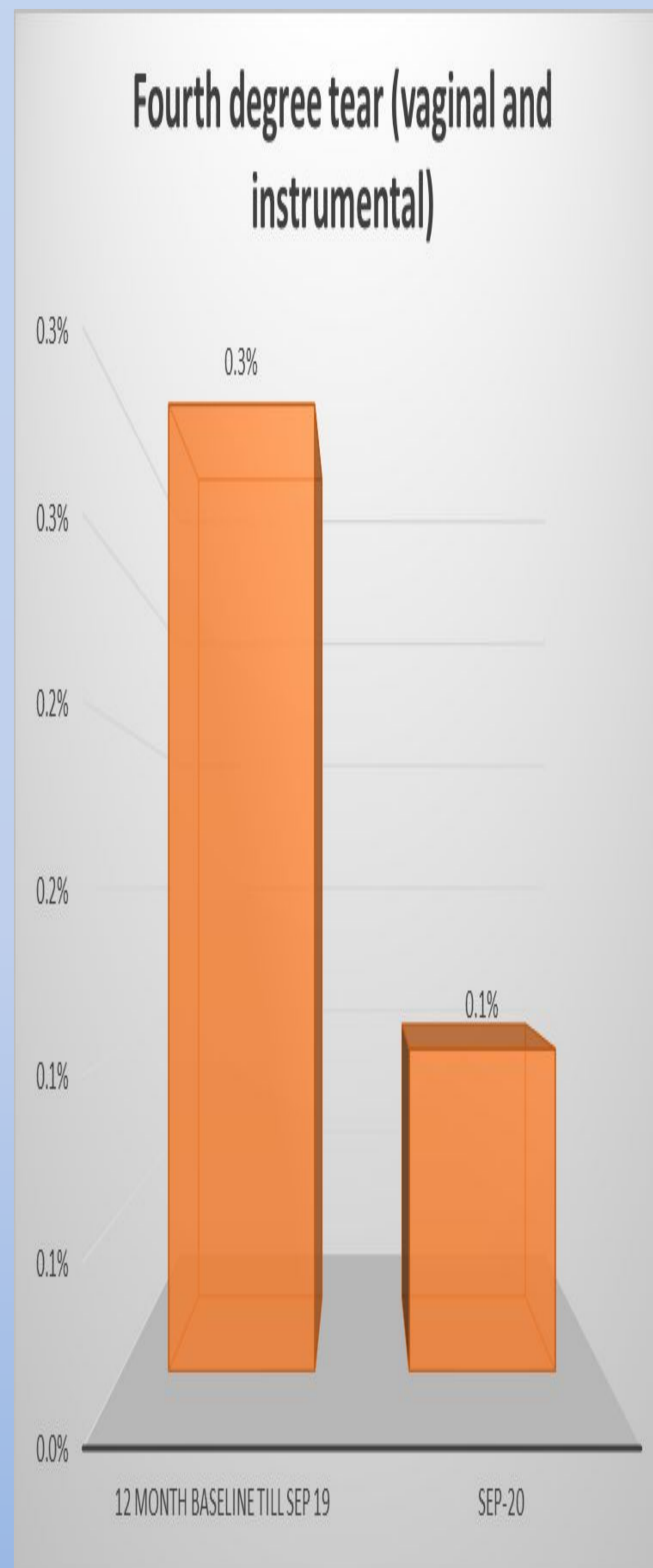
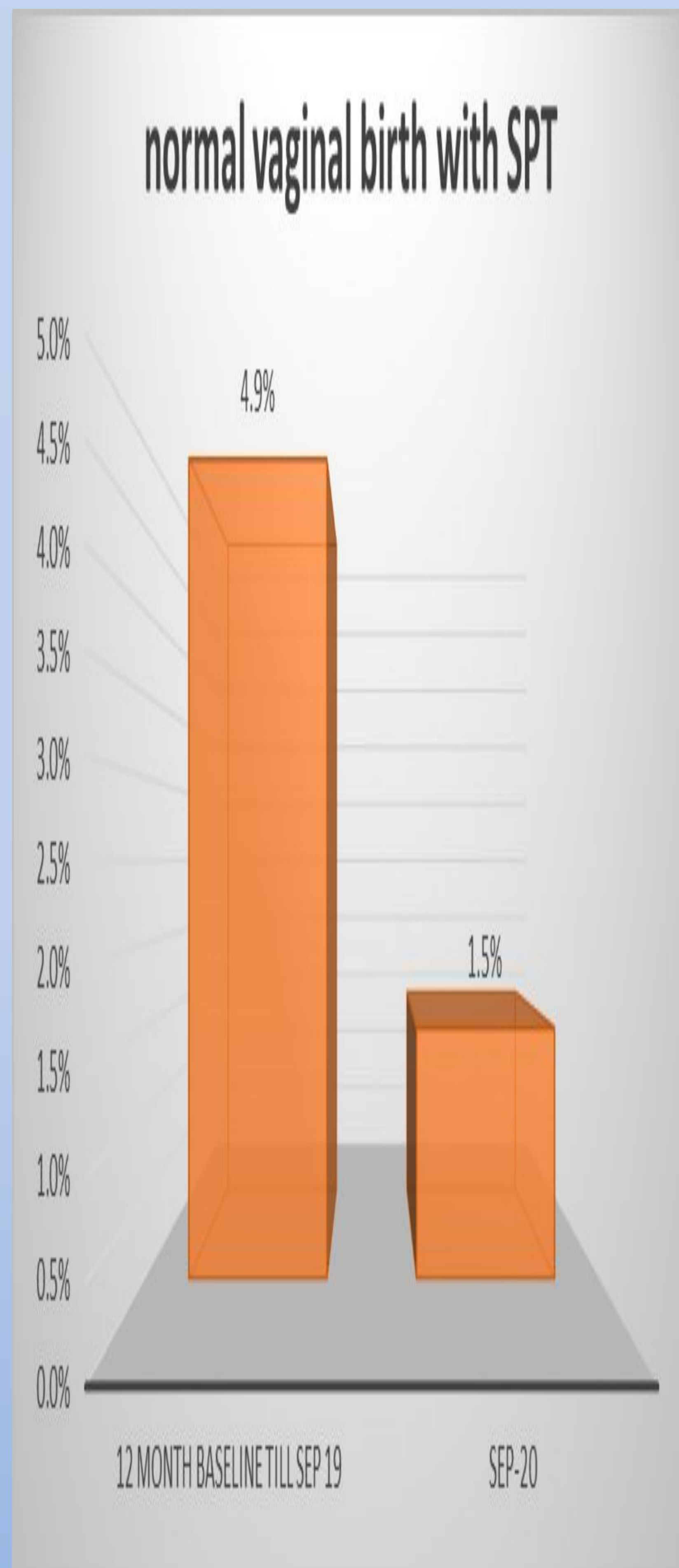
## Method

A literature review identified a number of evidence based interventions proven to reduce the rate of severe perineal trauma. These interventions were incorporated into The SUPPORT project, a bundle of care that was provided to all women in labour at our institution. We provided an initial education module as well as ongoing education and promotion of the project. A rolling audit of compliance with the bundle was performed along with audits of angle of episiotomy post repair.

The Support project bundle of care included:

- Provision of Warm perineal compresses
- Using a hands on the perineum technique
- Using gentle verbal guidance for slow controlled birth of the head
- Use of episiotomy when indicated
- Use of Episissors 60 with correct episiotomy angle
- Genito-anal exam on all women post a vaginal birth
- Examination and grading of perineal tears by two clinicians
- Consumer engagement with birth planning decisions
- Documentation of the above interventions on a Perineal Care, Assessment and Management Form
- Lateral maternal position if possible

Prospective approval received from Western Health Ethic Committee



**Chart 1: Rates of severe perineum trauma pre and post implementation of the SUPPORT project.**

## Results

- Implementation of the SUPPORT project lead to an overall decrease in SPT by 48% during the study period.
- SPT with normal vaginal births were decreased by 69%
- Fourth degree tears were reduced by 75%

### Compliance with the Support project:

an audit of the SUPPORT package detailed the above results were produced by increased application of the SUPPORT bundle of care

- o Increased application of warm perineal compress from 43% to 64%
- o Increased gentle verbal guidance from 66% to 81%
- o Increased episiotomy when indicated from 89% to 95%
- o 50% of episiotomies were made at the correct angle
- o Increase per-rectal examination from 42% to 83%
- o Increased perineal tear grading by two clinicians from 20% to 48%

## Discussion:

Vaginal birth remains a safe and beneficial experience for both mother and her child. Severe perineal trauma however, may have long lasting physical and psychological effects on the mother. Rates of severe perineal trauma have been increasing due to a number of factors. All institutions should continue to review their rates of severe perineal trauma and implement measures to reduce adverse outcomes for the mother.

## Conclusion

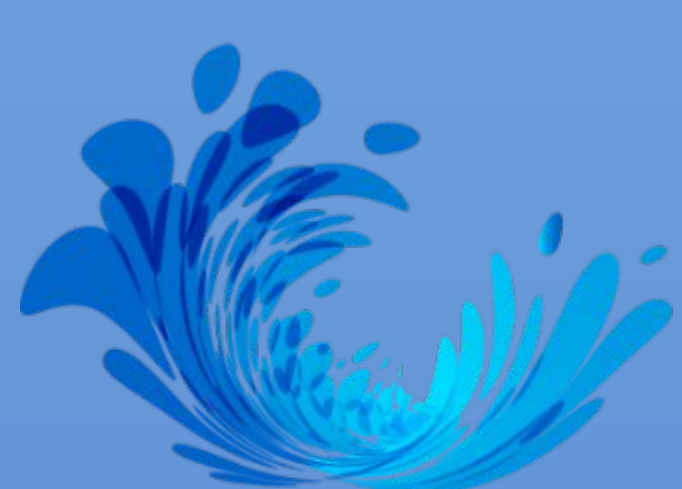
Implementation and promotion of a care bundle using evidence base interventions can reduce severe perineal trauma.

## Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all the assistance given to us by the wonderful staffs and patients of the Joan Kirner Hospital

## References

1. "Better Births for Women Collaborative." *Safer Care Victoria*, [www.safercare.vic.gov.au/improvement/projects/mbc/better-births](http://www.safercare.vic.gov.au/improvement/projects/mbc/better-births). Accessed 1 Sept. 2022.



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