Fetal neurology consultation: practical aspects and outcomes
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Fetal neurology consultation is an important “first contact” between families and subspecialists who can clarify diagnosis and prognosis for neurologically at risk fetuses. Consultation programs have developed across the country but very little literature exists on the impact these programs have on fetal outcomes. We reviewed our experience at Nationwide Children’s Hospital in Columbus, OH over the last 5 years with fetal neurology consultations and summarize the indications for referral, gestational age at referral and consultation, consultation recommendations, pregnancy and neonatal outcomes and final postnatal diagnosis when available. The vast majority of our 150 consultations were requested due to structural brain anomalies, intraventricular hemorrhage and arthrogryposis. Consultations were performed jointly with a neonatal neurologist and neonatologists as well as geneticist or neurosurgeon when indicated. Most patients were transferred to the NCH level 3 NICU when mother was discharged from birth hospital. Postnatal imaging was obtained as recommended by a consulting neonatal neurologist. Postnatal imaging confirmed prenatal diagnosis in most cases. The benefits of fetal consultation include: parental education and preparation for decisions related to pregnancy outcomes and neonatal care, birth planning and transfer arrangements to streamline urgent postnatal testing, and continuity of care for family and specialists who understand families’ values and priorities.