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A leading Irish doctor has been awarded two prestigious international awards following his research into more effective screening for fetal health. Professor Fergal Malone, who heads up the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, and is based at the Rotunda Hospital in Dublin, beat off more than a thousand research projects from all over the world to scoop the prize for best presentation at the scientific meeting in Miami, Florida.

Professor Malone, who recently returned to Dublin after nearly 15 years in America to take up his new post at the Rotunda, was also awarded the **Dru Carlson Memorial Prize** for best research in Ultrasound and in Genetics for his work.

Professor Malone says *"I am delighted to receive these honours especially as they come from my peers."* He added *"But much more important to me is the added benefits to Irish patients that this research will bring. It is tremendously valuable to be able to reassure so many patients so early in pregnancy regarding their baby's health."*

The awards were made by the U.S. based Society for Maternal Fetal Medicine. This organisation's annual conference - which is the leading international scientific gathering in the field of obstetrics - is attended by more than two thousand senior medics and researchers from all over the world.

Professor Malone and his team's research aimed to improve the effectiveness of screening for a range of fetal abnormalities. Current international best practice would suggest that expectant mothers be offered an ultrasound scan and blood test either in the 11th week or the 16th week of pregnancy. While both have a high degree of accuracy, neither can offer a one hundred per cent detection rate. However Professor Malone's team found that by offering mothers both tests, and combining them using a simple computer programme, the possibility of identifying conditions like Down syndrome is significantly improved, and would be considerably more cost effective. His earlier findings have recently been published in the New England Journal of Medicine.

At present these sophisticated combinations of screening tests are not yet available in Ireland. However, Professor Malone and his colleagues at the Rotunda Hospital, Dublin, have already begun offering the first step in this new programme to pregnant women throughout Ireland.

Professor Malone says *"Our referring physicians and their patients can now benefit from increased access at an early stage in pregnancy to gain the reassurance that they seek regarding baby's health. The Rotunda Hospital remains at the forefront of innovative care and continues to offer the latest advances in obstetric research to our patients."*