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Serum Creatinine in Pregnancy: A Systematic Review

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Introduction: Standard assessment of renal function in pregnancy is by measurement of serum creatinine concentration yet normal gestational ranges have not been established. The aim of this systematic review was to define the difference in serum creatinine in a healthy pregnancy compared with concentrations in nonpregnant women to facilitate identification of abnormal kidney function in pregnancy.

Methods: Medline, PubMed, Embase, Web of Science, theses, key obstetric texts, and conference proceedings were searched to July 2017. Eligible studies included quantification of serum creatinine concentration in a pregnant cohort, with either a reported local laboratory reference range or matched quantification in a nonpregnant cohort. The outcomes of interest were the mean and upper reference limits for creatinine in pregnancy, measured as a ratio of pregnant:nonpregnant values. Study heterogeneity was examined by meta-regression analysis.

Results: Forty-nine studies were identified. Data synthesis included 4421 serum creatinine values in pregnancy, weighted according to cohort size. Mean values for serum creatinine in pregnancy were 84%, 77%, and 80% of nonpregnant mean values during the first, second, and third trimesters, respectively. The 97.5th centile (upper limit of the 95% reference range) for serum creatinine in pregnancy was 85%, 80%, and 86% of the nonpregnant upper limit in sequential trimesters.

Conclusion: Based on a nonpregnant reference interval of 45–90 μmol/l (0.51–1.02 mg/dl), a serum creatinine of >77 μmol/l (0.87 mg/dl) should be considered outside the normal range for pregnancy. Future work can use this value to explore correlation of adverse pregnancy outcomes with serum creatinine concentration. PROSPERO registration: CRD42017068446

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concentration includes only 29 healthy pregnant women. Contemporaneous statements regarding creatinine concentration in pregnancy are largely based on expert opinion, including a “normal” range of 35 to 71 µmol/l (0.40–0.80 mg/dl), an “average” creatinine in pregnancy of 53 µmol/l (0.60 mg/dl), and a recommendation that serum creatinine in pregnancy greater than 75 µmol/l (0.85 mg/dl) should raise suspicion of kidney injury.

We report here a systematic review of studies including serum creatinine concentrations in healthy pregnancy. Serum creatinine concentrations measured in pregnant cohorts were compared with either a local laboratory reference interval or with creatinine concentrations derived from a matched nonpregnant cohort. The objective of the study was to compare serum creatinine concentration in pregnancy (“exposed” cohort) with nonpregnant (“unexposed”) via calculation of a ratio of pregnant:nonpregnant serum creatinine. The hypothesis of the study was that serum creatinine concentrations in pregnancy can be estimated as a proportion of matched nonpregnant values, thereby eliminating variation due to assay method and ethnicity, and allowing generation of generalizable normal reference ratios for serum creatinine concentration in pregnancy.

**METHODS**

Data sources and searches were conducted by 2 authors with training in (KW, KB), and experience of (KB) systematic review methodology. Medline, PubMed, and Embase were searched for first publication to July 2017. Search terms included creatinine, glomerular filtration, GFR, MDRD, Cockcroft, renal function, kidney function, biochemistry, clinical chemistry in combination with pregnancy, trimester, gestation, and creatinine values including measurement of serum creatinine, definition of normal pregnancy, gestation in weeks, and creatinine values including measures of data spread (SD, SE, or centile) were recorded. Where cohort ethnicity was not given, black and nonblack ethnicity was assigned based on the population demographic of the country in which the study took place. Disagreements were resolved by discussion between 2 authors (KW, KB), with arbitration from a third author (LC).

We defined exposure as pregnancy, and gestation at sample collection was recorded. To enable comparison, creatinine measures were converted from mg/dl to µmol/l using a conversion factor of 88.42.

A normal distribution of serum creatinine concentrations was assumed based on previously published cohort data both in nonpregnant and pregnant cohorts. Mean creatinine concentrations in the pregnant and nonpregnant cohorts were extracted from the raw data, or derived from the median or reference range on the assumption of a normal distribution. Similarly, creatinine reference intervals for both pregnant and nonpregnant cohorts were obtained from the
available raw data or a 97.5th centile (upper limit of the 95% reference range) was calculated as the mean value + 1.96 SDs.

Data were divided by trimesters of pregnancy (<13 weeks, 13–26 weeks, >26 weeks of gestation). Where a range of gestation was included within the data, data were allocated to the trimester for which the gestational range was most representative. If studies included more than 1 measure of creatinine in the same trimester, mean values for each trimester were calculated. Mean and upper reference values for creatinine concentration in pregnancy were converted to a proportion (percentage) of the equivalent value from either the nonpregnant cohort described in each study, or the mean and upper reference limit of the given local reference range. A bootstrapping method (described later in this article) was then used to provide a combined estimate for each trimester.

Statistical analysis was performed using Stata version 14.2 (StataCorp, College Station, TX). We used the calculation of the I² statistic\(^ {18,19}\) to test for heterogeneity in the pregnant:nonpregnant ratio between studies. Where heterogeneity was found, meta-regression was used to assess whether the differences between studies was due to the use of cross-sectional data, year of publication, the specific exclusion of renal disease, Jaffe and enzymatic methods of creatinine measurement, or black ethnicity. This was done by separate linear regression of each variable, in each trimester, with impact on the pregnant:nonpregnant creatinine ratio measured as a coefficient value. Year of publication was analyzed as a continuous measure and by conversion to decade. Analytic weights were defined by Stata.

The calculation of pregnant:nonpregnant creatinine ratios meant that SE measurements were not available, with no accepted method to estimate this quantity from summary data. The complexity of determining the variance and distribution of a ratio value meant we were unable to use most standard meta-analysis techniques including DerSimonian and Laird estimates of the combined effect, Forest plots, and an assessment of publication bias.\(^ {20}\) Data from the included studies were therefore synthesized using a bootstrapping technique. This

**Figure 1. Flow diagram of the identification process for eligible studies.**

Records identified through database searching \((n = 3409)\)

Records after duplicates removed \((n = 3297)\)

Records excluded \((n = 3033)\)

Title/abstract screened \((n = 3267)\)

Full-text articles excluded:
- No serum creatinine data \((n = 66)\)
- No nonpregnant control \((n = 63)\)
- Duplicate data \((n = 16)\)
- Abnormal pregnancy \((n = 15)\)
- Abnormal control \((n = 2)\)
- Review article \((n = 6)\)
- <6 weeks postpartum \((n = 6)\)
- No pregnancy data \((n = 2)\)
- Insufficient measure of data spread \((n = 6)\)
- Nonhuman study \((n = 1)\)
- Historical data \((n = 2)\)

Studies included \((n = 49)\)

1st trimester: 22 studies 1699 creatinine measurements

2nd trimester: 28 studies 2982 creatinine measurements

3rd trimester: 40 studies 3978 creatinine measurements

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility \((n = 234)\)
involved repeat sampling (10,000 repetitions) with each study acting as a single observation. Bootstrapping was informed by the assessment of heterogeneity and the results of the meta-regression. Heterogeneity between studies was high (I² > 99%). The inclusion of studies using a reference range as the nonpregnant comparator revealed an irreconcilable heterogeneity of data, which prevented meaningful synthesis. Heterogeneity was, however, reduced (I² = 12.3) when the pregnant:nonpregnant ratio was examined using studies with a large (>100 women) nonpregnant cohort. Meta-regression revealed the importance of pregnant cohort size. The bootstrapping technique, therefore, included all studies with a nonpregnant cohort, weighted according to the product of the geometric mean of pregnant and nonpregnant cohort size. Bias-corrected confidence intervals were generated using an automatic algorithm, which estimates and corrects for bias in the sampling process.21

This systematic review was registered on the PROSPERO database with registration number CRD42017068446.

RESULTS

Electronic searching identified 3297 unique citations including 11 sources identified by hand searching of textbooks. Of the 3267 available sources, we excluded 3033 sources on the basis of title and abstract review. Most excluded articles were studies of urinary creatinine concentration in pregnancy usually performed as part of a urinary protein:creatinine ratio in preeclampsia, and did not include serum creatinine measurement. Studies of amniotic, fetal, or neonatal creatinine measurement were also excluded. A further 185 sources were excluded after full-text review (Figure 1). Four studies were included after contacting the authors to provide local laboratory reference ranges at the time of their study. Forty-nine studies were included in the analysis. Study characteristics, including reference details, ethnicity, study type, sample size, trimester-specific creatinine measurements, creatinine assay method, assessment of normal pregnancy, and the Newcastle-Ottawa assessment of study quality are reported in Table 1.

Median pregnant cohort sizes were 40, 40, and 35 in the first, second, and third trimesters, respectively (interquartile range 17–67). Of the 49 included studies, only 9 had creatinine concentrations from more than 100 women within the same trimester. Detail regarding the specific exclusion of renal disease was made in 22 studies.

Nonpregnant control cohorts were the “unexposed” comparator in 39 studies. The median nonpregnant cohort size was 19 women (interquartile range 13–52). Only 3 studies included more than 100 nonpregnant women in the control cohort. Serum creatinine in pregnancy was compared to a laboratory reference interval in 10 studies. No details were available regarding how these laboratory reference intervals had been derived and whether they were specific to a female population.

Most studies had limited reporting of creatinine assay methods. Creatinine was quantified using the Jaffe reaction in 24 studies and by a kinetic enzymatic reaction in 11 studies. Assay method was not available for 14 studies. Interassay precision was reported in only 10 studies. No studies documented whether creatinine assay methods were traceable to an isotope dilution mass spectrometry reference, according to current recommendation.22

Study quality was variable. In 19 of the 49 studies, “normal” pregnancy was confirmed after completion of the pregnancy, with exclusion of data from women who experienced an abnormal pregnancy. However, quality scores ranged from 4 to 9 on the Newcastle-Ottawa scale based on selection, comparability, and outcome. Based on previously described thresholds for quality assessment,23 only 11 of the 49 studies were classified as “good” quality for this systematic review.

Meta-regression demonstrated that the size of the pregnant cohort had a significant impact on the pregnant:nonpregnant creatinine ratio across all 3 trimesters. The use of cross-sectional data, year and decade of publication, the specific exclusion of renal disease, creatinine assay method, and black ethnicity showed no significant effect on the ratio result (Table 2).

Data synthesis included all studies that had a matched pregnant control cohort as the nonpregnant comparator. This included 816 creatinine values (19 studies) from the first trimester, 1183 creatinine values (22 studies) from the second trimester, and 2422 creatinine values (30 studies) from the third trimester. Mean values for serum creatinine in pregnancy were 84% (95% confidence interval 76%–90%), 77% (72%–83%), and 80% (77%–83%) of mean values outside of pregnancy during the first, second, and third trimesters, respectively. Using the 97.5th centile (upper limit of the 95% reference range), serum creatinine in pregnancy was 85% (76%–93%), 80% (73%–89%), and 86% (83%–89%) of the upper reference limit for nonpregnant women in sequential trimesters (Table 3, Figure 2).

DISCUSSION

Data synthesis from this systematic review creates a mean and upper reference limit for serum creatinine in pregnancy, compared with nonpregnant values. Mean serum creatinine in pregnancy is 77% to 84% of mean values outside of pregnancy, and the reference limit for
| Author               | Year | Country/Ethnicity | Longitudinal or cross-sectional | Control Trimester 1 | n   | Mean Cr | ULN   | n   | Mean Cr |
|---------------------|------|-------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|------|---------|-------|------|---------|
| Afolabi^38          | 2011 | Nigeria           | C                               | 15                  | 58   | [0.65]  | 80    | [0.90] |
| Akbari^39           | 2005 | Canada            | C                               | 13                  | 74   | [0.84]  | 86    | [0.97] |
| Al-Kuran^40         | 2012 | Jordan            | L                               | LRR                 | 15   | 71      | [0.80] | 797  | 67      | [0.76] |
| Baboy^41            | 2005 | Saudi Arabia      | C                               | 40                  | 58   | [0.66]  | 71    | [0.80] |
| Bobu^42             | 2013 | India             | C                               | LRR                 | 10   | 69      | [0.78] | 78   | [0.88]  |
| Chapman^43          | 1998 | WE:AC=10:1        | L                               | 13                  | 71   | [0.80]  | 88    | [1.00] |
| Collins^45          | 1981 | Canada            | C                               | 65                  | 71   | [0.80]  | 88    | [1.00] |
| Dowson^46           | 1980 | UK                | L                               | 10                  | 69   | [0.78]  | 104   | [1.18] |
| Dowson^47           | 1980 | UK                | L                               | 9                   | 72   | [0.81]  | 85    | [0.96] |
| Djordjevic^48       | 2004 | Serbia-Montenegro | L                               | 30                  | 61   | [0.69]  | 83    | [0.94] |
| Duvekot^49          | 1995 | Netherlands       | C                               | 10                  | 56   | [0.63]  | 71    | [0.86] |
| Fasshauser^50       | 2008 | Germany           | C                               | LRR                 | 76   | [0.86]  | 104   | [1.18] |
| Fasshauser^51       | 2008 | Germany           | C                               | LRR                 | 76   | [0.86]  | 104   | [1.18] |
| Lain^52             | 2005 | USA               | L                               | 26                  | 72   | [0.81]  | 89    | [1.01] |
| Larsson^53          | 2008 | Sweden            | C                               | 51                  | 67   | [0.76]  | 86    | [0.97] |
| Lockitch^54         | 1993 | Majorhy WE        | L                               | 121                 | 73   | [0.83]  | 94    | [1.06] |
| Lohsirivat^55       | 2008 | Thailand          | L                               | 26                  | 72   | [0.82]  | 90    | [1.02] |
| Mohammed^56         | 2014 | 91% WE            | L                               | 54                  | 68   | [0.77]  | 88    | [1.00] |
| Mojewska^57         | 2010 | Poland            | L                               | 40                  | 72   | [0.81]  | 94    | [1.06] |
| Mukunya^58          | 2002 | Zimbabwe          | C                               | LRR                 | 78   | [0.88]  | 121   | [1.37] |
| Mafucci^59          | 1997 | Italy             | L                               | 18                  | 82   | [0.93]  | 102   | [1.15] |
| Milman^60           | 2007 | Denmark           | L                               | 164                 | 75   | [0.85]  | 96    | [1.09] |
| Milne^61            | 2002 | UK (WE)           | L                               | 11                  | 65   | [0.74]  | 95    | [1.07] |
| Min-Dashe^62        | 2014 | Nigeria           | C                               | 127                 | 79   | [0.89]  | 118   | [1.33] |
| Ogugbue^63          | 2011 | UK                | L                               | 13                  | 88   | [1.00]  | 107   | [1.21] |
| Pahl^64             | 2001 | USA               | C                               | 15                  | 67   | [0.76]  | 83    | [0.94] |
| Roberts^65          | 1996 | UK (WE)           | L                               | 11                  | 74   | [0.84]  | 88    | [1.00] |
| Sfeir^66            | 2012 | USA               | L                               | 12                  | 71   | [0.8]   | 101   | [1.14] |
| Schoonmaker^67      | 2013 | Gambia            | C                               | 10                  | 59   | [0.67]  | 89    | [1.00] |
| Siddiqui^68         | 1993 | Pakistan          | C                               | 30                  | 69   | [0.79]  | 88    | [1.00] |
| Stevens^69          | 2002 | Sweden            | C                               | 12                  | 61   | [0.69]  | 83    | [0.94] |
| Van Buul^70         | 1995 | Netherlands       | L                               | LRR                 | 70   | [0.79]  | 90    | [1.02] |
| Vural^71            | 1998 | Turkey            | C                               | 15                  | 63   | [0.72]  | 95    | [1.07] |
| de Weerd^72,73      | 2003 | Netherlands       | L                               | 96                  | 70   | [0.79]  | 188   | 62 [0.70] |
| Weissberg^74        | 1991 | Israel            | C                               | 9                   | 77   | [0.87]  | 92    | [1.04] |

Creatinine values are given as μmol/l [mg/dl].
AC, Afro-Caribbean; Cr, creatinine; LRR, laboratory reference range; Med, Mediterranean; ULN, upper limit of normal; WE, white European.
*Assessment of pregnancy normality: 1 = limited data, 2 = exclusion of comorbidity associated with abnormal renal function, e.g., preeclampsia, diabetes, vascular disease, 3 = specific exclusion of renal disease,
*but not excluded from study data.
Provided by study author/center or available from an alternative source and appropriate for date of study.
Women with emesis excluded from extracted data.
Includes 2 study cohorts at different altitude.
Total 131 pregnant women, distribution between trimesters not recorded.
Mean creatinine data only, upper limit data not derived from interquartile range.
serum creatinine is 80% to 86% of that in nonpregnant women. Based on a normal female range for serum creatinine of 45 to 90 µmol/l (0.51–1.02 mg/dl), this equates to mean serum creatinine values of 56 µmol/l (0.63 mg/dl), 52 µmol/l (0.59 mg/dl), and 54 µmol/l (0.61 mg/dl) in sequential trimesters, whereas serum

### Table 1. (Continued)

| Trimester 1 | Trimester 2 | Trimester 3 | Creatinine | Assessment of pregnancy normality | Normal pregnancy outcome confirmed | Newcastle-Ottowa grade |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|
| ULN         | n           | Mean Cr     | ULN         | n           | Mean Cr     | ULN         | n           | Mean Cr     | ULN         |
| 9           | 61 [0.69]   | 93 [1.05]   | 3           | 57 [0.64]   | 104 [1.18] | Jaffe       | 6           |             |
| 68          | 52 [0.59]   | 69 [0.78]   | 68          | 54 [0.61]   | 78 [0.88]  | Not stated  | 7           |             |
| 97 [1.10]   | 797         | 84 [0.72]   | 797         | 72 [0.81]   | 132 [1.4]  | Jaffe       | 6           |             |
| 75 [0.85]   | 53          | 57 [0.64]   | 81 [0.92]   | 50          | 52 [0.59]   | 70 [0.79]  | Not stated  | 3           | Yes         |
| 77 [0.87]   | 8           | 53 [0.60]   | 73 [0.83]   | 8           | 49 [0.55]   | 68 [0.77]  | Jaffe       | 3           |             |
| 68 [0.77]   |             |             |             | 350         | 53 [0.60]   | 71 [0.80]  | Jaffe       | 6           |             |
| 77 [0.87]   | 9           | 57 [0.64]   | 69 [0.78]   | 10          | 60 [0.68]   | 104 [1.18] | Enzymatic   | 9           |             |
| 91 [1.03]   |             |             |             | 7           | 57 [0.64]   | 104 [1.18] | Enzymatic   | 8           |             |
| 68 [0.77]   |             |             |             | 20          | 55 [0.62]   | 79 [0.89]  | Not stated  | 5           |             |
| 75 [0.85]   | 10          | 55 [0.62]   | 71 [0.80]   | 40          | 54 [0.61]   | 93 [1.05]  | Not stated  | 3           |             |
| 84 [0.96]   | 271         | 63 [0.71]   | 126 [1.41]  | 68          | 54 [0.61]   | 97 [1.10]  | Jaffe       | 6           |             |
| 96          | 42 [0.48]   | 52 [0.59]   | 96          | 54 [0.61]   | 70 [0.79]  | Jaffe       | 4           |             |
| 118 [1.33]  | 40          | 75 [0.85]   | 94 [1.06]   | 40          | 54 [0.61]   | 92 [1.04]  | Jaffe       | 3           |             |
| 5           | 66 [0.75]   | 88 [1.00]   |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| 96 [1.07]   | 22          | 70 [0.79]   | 94 [1.07]   | 23          | 69 [0.78]   | 94 [1.06]  | Jaffe       | 6           |             |
| 37          | 68 [0.77]   | 94 [1.06]   | 34          | 66 [0.75]   | 94 [1.06]  | Not stated  | 2           | Yes         |
| 118–74      | 47–56 [0.53–0.63] | 58–74 [0.66–0.83] | Jaffe   | 2           | Yes         |
| 532         | 58 [0.66]   | 73 [0.83]   | 358         | 62 [0.70]   | 84 [0.95]  | Enzymatic   | 2           | Yes         |
| 74 [0.84]   |             |             |             | 546         | 51 [0.58]   | 78 [0.88]  | Jaffe       | 5           |             |
| 70 [0.79]   | 107         | 51 [0.58]   | 64 [0.72]   | 88          | 54 [0.61]   | 70 [0.79]  | Enzymatic   | 3           | Yes         |
| 92 [1.04]   | 63          | 44 [0.50]   | 99 [1.12]   | 63          | 50 [0.57]   | 92 [1.04]  | Enzymatic   | 3           | Yes         |
| 62 [0.70]   | 51          | 46 [0.52]   | 62 [0.70]   | 52          | 47 [0.53]   | 72 [0.81]  | Jaffe       | 2           | Yes         |
| 77             | 29          | 50 [0.57]   | 73 [0.83]   | 29          | 56 [0.63]   | 87 [0.98]  | Enzymatic   | 2           | Yes         |
| 69 [0.78]   |             |             |             | 26          | 64 [0.72]   | 84 [0.96]  | Jaffe       | 3           | Yes         |
| 63 [0.72]   | 40          | 46 [0.52]   | 60 [0.68]   | 40          | 52 [0.59]   | 75 [0.85]  | Not stated  | 3           |             |
| 82 [0.93]   | 18          | 62 [0.70]   | 78 [0.88]   | 18          | 65 [0.74]   | 77 [0.87]  | Jaffe       | 2           | Yes         |
| 394         | 55 [0.62]   | 71 [0.80]   | 521         | 58 [0.66]   | 81 [0.92]  | Jaffe       | 2           | Yes         |
| 68 [0.77]   | 43`         | 46 [0.52]   | 59 [0.67]   | 43`         | 65 [0.74]   | 94 [1.06]  | Enzymatic   | 1           |             |
| 96 [1.09]   | 13          | 77 [0.87]   | 106 [1.19]  | 12          | 74 [0.84]   | 106 [1.20] | Jaffe       | 1           | Yes         |
| 16          | 64 [0.72]   | 76 [0.86]   |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| 16          | 54 [0.61]   | 66 [0.74]   | 11          | 53 [0.60]   | 63 [0.71]  | Jaffe       | 3           | Yes         |
| 12          | 53 [0.60]   | 77 [0.87]   | 12          | 62 [0.70]   | 80 [0.91]  | Jaffe       | 1           | Yes         |
| 10          | 74 [0.84]   | 68 [0.77]   |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| 35          | 49 [0.64]   | 58 [0.76]   |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| 14          | 48 [0.54]   | 66 [0.75]   |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| 70 [0.79]   | 66          | 59 [0.68]   | 70 [0.79]   | 66          | 59 [0.67]   | 75 [0.85]  | Jaffe       | 3           | Yes         |
| 20          | 61 [0.69]   | 73 [0.83]   |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| 32          | 61 [0.69]   | 71 [0.81]   |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |

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creatinine values greater than 76 μmol/l (0.86 mg/dl) in the first trimester, 72 μmol/l (0.81 mg/dl) in the second trimester, and 77 μmol/l (0.87 mg/dl) in the third trimester should be considered to be outside the upper limit of normal for pregnancy. A serum creatinine greater than 77 μmol/l (0.87 mg/dl) in pregnancy should raise the possibility of either acute kidney injury, or undiagnosed chronic kidney disease predating the pregnancy.

As far as we are aware, this is the only study published to date that attempts to offer a value for serum creatinine in pregnancy that is generalizable and not limited to a specific population or creatinine assay technique. The strength of this study is that, through the use of a ratio of pregnant to nonpregnant values, it provides a synthesis of published creatinine data from multiple normal pregnant cohorts, across different ethnicities and assay techniques. Previous reports of creatinine concentration according to gestation are limited by small numbers of women, diverse methodology, and insufficient information about disease states in “normal women.”

The main limitation of this study is in the amount of heterogeneity in the included data. This is likely to be due to a combination of both study design and clinical factors. The complexity of generating SD or SE values for a ratio value\(^{20}\) means that the precision of each study is not considered in the meta-analysis. In addition, creatinine data are summarized as single value for each trimester, which may fail to adequately represent the true variation in serum creatinine for individual pregnant women, including a progressive physiological adaption to both early pregnancy and parturition.\(^{25–28}\)

Heterogeneity was reduced when the ratio of pregnant:nonpregnant creatinine used a matched nonpregnant cohort, compared with ratios generated from laboratory reference intervals. This is likely due to quantification in a control population being performed over the same time period as the samples taken during pregnancy, conferring less analytical variance and better reproducibility of values.\(^{25}\) In contrast, heterogeneity when using a laboratory reference range as the nonpregnant comparator may have arisen due to baseline differences between the reference and pregnant cohorts, including gender, age, and ethnicity; although there was insufficient information on the generation of the reference intervals in the included studies to allow assessment of this.

Meta-regression showed no significant difference in the pregnant:nonpregnant creatinine ratio related to the use of alkaline picrate (Jaffe) or enzymatic assay methods. This suggests that either the 2 techniques are affected by pregnancy equally, or that differences between assay techniques are insignificant relative to the effect of pregnancy on serum creatinine concentration. However, dichotomization by assay technique may be overly simplistic. This review includes internationally diverse studies, performed over a 34-year period. Although most studies used a Jaffe method, this is known to lack standardization, resulting in significant methodological variation, which is not measurable in this study.\(^{30}\) Confirmation of the findings of this systematic review using isotope dilution mass spectrometry traceable creatinine assay methods\(^{12}\) is warranted.
The results of this study concur with the known physiological changes of pregnancy; namely a fall in serum creatinine due to gestational hyperfiltration resulting in a 50% increase in creatinine clearance by the second trimester, followed by a decrease in creatinine clearance during the third trimester leading to an increase in serum creatinine concentration toward term. This study suggests that the normal range for creatinine in pregnancy is either comparable to, or lower than that derived from other published cohorts, which are limited by assay method, ethnic differences in creatinine, and small cohort sizes.

The synthesis of data in this study generated a mean value and upper reference range limit for creatinine in pregnancy as a relative proportion of a matched nonpregnant cohort. In practice, clinicians have access to a laboratory reference range for creatinine, rather than a matched control value. For example, at the authors’ institution (Guy’s and St. Thomas NHS Foundation Trust), the female-specific reference interval for serum creatinine is 45 to 90 μmol/l (0.51–1.02 mg/dl). This is derived from 269 healthy, Red Cross blood donors. Although gender specific, this reference interval is not specific for women of childbearing age, as the reference population is aged 18 to 70 years. However, the use of this reference interval to derive values for childbearing age women can be justified on the basis that an increased prevalence of silent chronic kidney disease with age is potentially counterbalanced by a simultaneous age-related decline in creatinine synthesis, with minimal effect on absolute serum creatinine values. Indeed, serum creatinine values have been shown to be stable in female, white European populations between the ages of 20 and 70 years.

However, the generation of an upper limit for serum creatinine in pregnancy through conversion of a local reference range will always be subject to the limitations under which that reference range was generated, and whether that reference interval is appropriately matched for gender and ethnicity.

Acute kidney injury occurs most commonly during pregnancy in the third trimester, predominantly due to the development of hypertensive disorders and puerperal pathologies including sepsis and hemorrhage. Diagnostic criteria for acute kidney injury do not exist in pregnancy, and up to 40% of pregnancy-associated acute kidney injury may be missed by clinicians in the United Kingdom.
reference limit for serum creatinine in the third trimester is based on data from 30 studies, including 2422 pregnant women. Based on a nonpregnant upper limit for creatinine of 90 μmol/l (1.02 mg/dl), a new serum creatinine of >77 μmol/l (0.87 mg/dl) should trigger investigation for underlying acute kidney injury.

This study generated a mean and upper reference limit for creatinine in pregnancy, as a percentage of that outside of pregnancy. In the absence of both a valid measure of estimated GFR and practical measure of true GFR in pregnancy, the assessment of renal function in pregnant women remains limited to serum creatinine despite confounders, insensitivity, and interassay variability. However, the use of creatinine thresholds of 85%, 80%, and 86% of the upper limit of the nonpregnant reference range for the first, second, and third trimesters, respectively, represents a new and clinically relevant diagnostic parameter, which is potentially generalizable across different cohorts and creatinine assay methods.

A clinically relevant reference interval distinguishes physiology from pathology. The clinical utility of the pathological threshold suggested by this systematic review now requires prospective studies that correlate a creatinine in pregnancy that is >86% of the upper limit for nonpregnant women with adverse maternal and/or neonatal outcomes. Whether a similar percentage change in serum creatinine in pregnancy is seen in women with chronic kidney disease remains unknown, although a failure of serum creatinine to fall in the first trimester of pregnancy is hypothesized to represent a failure of the renal system to adapt in pregnancy and is used anecdotally as a poor prognostic indicator.37 Future research is required into patterns of serum creatinine change in women with chronic kidney disease who do and do not develop adverse pregnancy outcomes.

**DISCLOSURE**

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**SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL**

**Supplementary Material.** Electronic search strategy. Supplementary material is linked to the online version of the paper at http://www.kireports.org.

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