ALTERNATIVES TO AN ESTIMATED DATE OF BIRTH: WHAT ARE WOMEN’S PREFERENCES?

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Introduction
Clinical staff use estimated date of birth (EDB) to determine the length of a pregnancy, and understand that dating methods are imprecise. Some have suggested alternatives to an EDB, such as a ‘delivered by date’ at 42 weeks, however women’s attitudes to such alternatives have not been explored.

Method
Pregnant women attending antenatal clinics at four public hospitals in Sydney between July and December 2012 completed a survey that included questions about women’s expectations of giving birth around the EDB, and preferences towards four options for timing of birth information (including the likelihood of each): a single day, an estimated week, an estimated fortnight, the latest date by which birth is almost certain.

Results
Among 784 surveyed women, 42% believed they would birth before their EDB; only 15% believed they would give birth within a day or so of their EDB. Women in early pregnancy were more uncertain about the likely timing of their birth than those late in pregnancy (34% vs 21%, p=0.0002). When women were presented with four options about timing of birth information, only 30% preferred a single day. None of the maternal characteristics examined were associated with these responses.

Conclusion
Women understand that the EDB is imprecise. While some women find a single estimated date of birth helpful to prepare for the baby’s arrival and to make work and support arrangements, most women in this study expressed a preference for other types of estimates for timing of birth.