

# A mermaid in a dry ocean: A case of missed sirenomelia masked by severe oligohydramnios

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Sirenomelia, or "mermaid syndrome," is a rare and typically fatal congenital malformation characterised by fusion of the lower limbs, often accompanied by severe genitourinary and gastrointestinal anomalies. Despite advances in prenatal imaging, diagnosis remains challenging, particularly in the presence of severe oligohydramnios. **Case Description:** A 40-year-old gravida 7 para 6 woman presented at 25 weeks gestation for late antenatal booking and was diagnosed with gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM). An ultrasound at the primary care level revealed severe oligohydramnios, prompting referral to a tertiary centre. On specialist review, she was found to have preterm prelabour rupture of membranes (PPROM). Fetal ultrasound showed breech presentation with persistent anhydramnios. Despite limited imaging, key anomalies were noted: absent urinary bladder, non-visualisation of the lower spine, and visible bilateral kidneys. The couple was counselled on the poor fetal prognosis and opted for conservative management. At 29 weeks, she developed fetal bradycardia and underwent emergency cesarean section. The neonate demonstrated classic features of sirenomelia and succumbed within hours of birth. **Discussion:** This case highlights the diagnostic and management challenges of sirenomelia in the context of late antenatal care and severe oligohydramnios. The presence of GDM raises consideration of possible metabolic contributions to the condition. Clinicians should remain vigilant for hallmark sonographic findings – specially fused limbs and absent bladder — even in suboptimal conditions. Early identification enables timely counselling, multidisciplinary involvement, and informed decision-making for this invariably fatal anomaly.