Organization of Teratology Information Specialists: 
History and Framework

The Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS) is dedicated to providing accurate evidence-based, clinical information to patients and health care professionals about exposures during pregnancy and lactation. The organization serves to provide education, to conduct relevant research, and to support teratology information services throughout North America. OTIS has established the following goals:

- Provide counseling to patients and health care professionals about exposures related to pregnancy and breastfeeding, so they can make informed treatment choices.
- Reduce risks and decrease the number of preventable birth defects by educating the public and health care professionals about specific agents of concern.
- Empower patients with accurate information about the true risks of an exposure, thereby preventing unnecessary terminations of wanted pregnancies.
- Facilitate communication and collaboration between teratology information services.
- Contribute collectively to research and the worldwide literature in the field of teratology.

OTIS was first established as the Organization of Teratology Information Services in 1990 by individual teratology information services throughout the United States and Canada. It was incorporated in April 1999 as a not-for-profit organization. While OTIS members primarily represent Teratology Information Services (TIS) located in the United States and Canada, some members hail from services outside North America and many members are not directly affiliated with a TIS. To accurately reflect this diverse membership, OTIS changed its name in 2005 from the Organization of Teratology Information Services to the Organization of Teratology Information Specialists. Members of OTIS have a wide range of backgrounds and experience in the field of teratology and include medical doctors, genetic counselors, nurses, researchers, and educators.

OTIS is governed by a board of directors, an elected body consisting of a president, president elect, immediate past president, secretary, treasurer, and three members-at-large. OTIS appoints an executive director to manage the OTIS National Office located at the University of Arizona in Tucson, Arizona. The OTIS National Office also employs an administrative assistant on a part-time basis. OTIS has several working committees including education, research, website, abstract, public affairs, meeting planning, elections, and membership. Committees meet once a year at the Annual Education Conference and hold conference calls throughout the year as needed.
OTIS established a national call routing system in 2002, by which anyone in North America calling the toll-free national OTIS number, 1-866-626-6847, will be routed to their own state’s TIS or another service that can take their inquiry. OTIS strives to maintain consistency in level and quality of service for all TIS taking calls from outside their own states, so services that have the greatest capacity to manage a high call volume are assigned to receive calls from multiple states.

All OTIS members are encouraged to attend the Annual Education Conference, typically held in June of each year in conjunction with the Teratology Society and Neurobehavioral Teratology Society meetings. The conference agenda consists of four days of invited speakers, abstract and platform presentations, and a poster session. Conference goals are to provide evidence-based information necessary to counsel women and their health care providers about exposures during pregnancy and lactation, and to enhance communication among TIS personnel, teratology researchers, lactation experts, and public health and pharmaceutical professionals. The Annual Education Conference is an opportunity for OTIS members to attend OTIS business and committee meetings, receive updates about OTIS collaborative research, and network with other OTIS members and individuals in the field of teratology.

OTIS has become widely recognized for its unique and valuable approach to developing evidence-based information on the safety of medications, chemicals, and other exposures during pregnancy. Because of its ability to monitor pregnancy exposures over a wide geographic area, OTIS receives inquiries from pharmaceutical companies and other research organizations interested in conducting single drug pregnancy registries. There are several ongoing OTIS Collaborative Research Studies, in which OTIS identifies and recruits women through its North American network of teratology information services in order to track and record outcomes after various exposures during pregnancy. In order to facilitate active participation in OTIS research, research coordinators from various TIS and OTIS Research Committee members meet twice a year to discuss research protocols and subject recruitment, once at the Annual Education Conference in June and once at a mid-year meeting in January.

A critical function of OTIS is to educate patients, health care professionals, and the general public about the field of teratology. OTIS has developed many fact sheets about various exposures during pregnancy and lactation in the general categories of medications, infections and vaccines, illicit substances, herbal products, maternal medical conditions, and other common exposures. The OTIS fact sheets are reader friendly and include information about breastfeeding and paternal exposures as well as exposure risks prior to and during pregnancy. OTIS fact sheets, as well as other types of educational resources for patients and health care providers, are available on the OTIS website at www.otispregnancy.org.

With its diverse membership composed of experts in the fields of teratology and women’s health, its unique approach to evidence-based research, and its dedication to the evaluation and dissemination of current and accurate information regarding exposures
during pregnancy and lactation, OTIS has established itself as one of the world’s primary teratology research organizations and a critical resource for patients and health care providers throughout North America. As we celebrate our 20th anniversary as an organization, OTIS strives to increase its membership and involvement in new research endeavors in order to grow as an organization and continue to fulfill its goals in teratology education, service, and research.