January 27, 2013, Melbourne, FL - The Preeclampsia Foundation today issued a statement responding to an unexpected plot twist in Downton Abbey, a popular television show, that aired earlier tonight, to clarify historical facts and to inform viewers that the maternal death portrayed in the historical drama is still a tragic and needless complication of pregnancy.

The British television drama has a robust and loyal American following on PBS . Last night, 8 million viewers were shocked when one of the show's beloved characters, Lady Sybil Crawley, died from eclampsia after giving birth. Although this fictional TV series represents life in the early 1900's, women in the United States and elsewhere still die or suffer terrible outcomes from the hypertensive disorders of pregnancy (e.g., preeclampsia, eclampsia, HELLP syndrome), leaving many viewers grieving also because of their own all-too-similar tragedies.

Every year in the U.S., 5 to 8 percent (up to 300,000) pregnant or postpartum women develop a hypertensive disorder of pregnancy with approximately 75,000 of them suffering severe adverse outcomes such as organ failure, massive blood loss, permanent disability, or death; and premature birth or the death of their babies. Preeclampsia is characterized by a large rise in blood pressure and failing kidneys. Eclampsia is the name for seizures during pregnancy.

"There were many scenes that resonated for preeclampsia survivors," said Eleni Tsigas, Executive Director of the Preeclampsia Foundation. "The symptoms she experienced, the interactions with the physicians, the false confidence after the healthy delivery, the heartbreaking scene where the widower is left holding his newborn daughter, and the resulting guilt and blame all ring very true to preeclampsia survivors. However," she adds, "the apparent inability of the physicians to intervene during her seizure was not an accurate portrayal."

Magnesium sulfate was introduced in 1906 to treat eclamptic seizures, and although it was not universally used until the 1990's, other anticonvulsants and manual interventions would have been used in the early 1900's. This and other historical facts are available today on the Preeclampsia Foundation's website
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Today, pregnant women are routinely monitored during prenatal care visits for signs of preeclampsia, but that wasn't always the case. In Downton Abbey, a London physician

dismisses the concerns of Lady Sybil and her family. “Sadly, some medical providers still dismiss women’s concerns,” says Tsigas. “Women need to be aware of the symptoms, to keep their prenatal appointments, and report between visits if they don’t feel well. Sometimes they have to be persistent in getting medical attention. At our website, women will find many resources to become informed and find support. It’s our mission to save lives.”

The Preeclampsia Foundation is a U.S.-based 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization established in 2000. It is dedicated to providing patient support and education, raising public awareness, catalyzing research and improving health care practices, envisioning a world where preeclampsia and related hypertensive disorders of pregnancy no longer threaten the lives of mothers and babies. For more information, visit www.preeclampsia.org.