

Board of examiners

**Dr. Esther Feijen – de Jong**

Midwifery Academy Amsterdam Groningen AVAG  
University of Groningen

**Prof. Dr. Lieven Annemans**

Department of Public Health  
Ghent University

**Prof. Dr. Léonardo Gucciardo**

Department of Obstetrics  
Universitair Ziekenhuis Brussel

**Prof. Dr. Eva Swinnen**

Department of Neurological Rehabilitation and Rehabilitation Psychology  
Vrije Universiteit Brussel

**Prof. Dr. Johan Bilsen, Chair**

Department of Public Health  
Vrije Universiteit Brussel

**Prof. Dr. Koen Putman, Promotor**

Department of Public Health  
Vrije Universiteit Brussel

**Prof. Dr. Katrien Beeckman, Co-promotor**

Department of Public Health/Department of Nursing and Midwifery  
Vrije Universiteit Brussel/Universitair Ziekenhuis Brussel



PhD in Social Health Sciences  
2018-2019

INVITATION to the Public defence of

**Maike FOBELETS**

To obtain the academic degree of '**DOCTOR IN SOCIAL HEALTH SCIENCES**'

**Aspects of health economic evaluations in perinatal care in an international context.**

**Monday 26 November 2018**

Auditorium **Piet Brouwer**, 17:00  
Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy, Laarbeeklaan 103, 1090 Brussel

How to reach the campus Jette:

<http://www.vub.ac.be/english/infoabout/campuses>

---

## Summary of the dissertation

There is an increasing interest of health economic evaluations as an outcome to assess and compare health effects and costs of interventions, treatments or medical devices, next to the clinical outcomes. In perinatal care, the number of empirical studies including health economic evaluations are growing. An example of such a study is the OptiBIRTH trial, a multi-centre cluster randomised controlled trial, conducted in Germany, Ireland and Italy, aimed to investigate the effects of a woman-centred intervention designed to increase vaginal birth after caesarean (VBAC) through enhanced women-centred care. This dissertation is written in the context of the OptiBIRTH trial and provides insights in the different aspects of health economic evaluations in perinatal care in an international context.

To start, we addressed several methodological challenges for health economic evaluations in perinatal care. A framework was developed to improve the comparability of health economic evaluations of perinatal care in an international setting, and to lower barriers for perinatal healthcare professionals, researchers and policy makers in understanding and performing health economic evaluations in perinatal care.

Secondly, we evaluated the three months postnatal Health Related Quality of Life and the associations with the preference for birth mode and the actual birth mode in women after one previous caesarean section.

Furthermore, the health economic implications of VBAC were evaluated. First, a health economic evaluation was performed to assess the cost-effectiveness of attempting a VBAC versus an elective repeat caesarean section based on a hypothetical cohort in four EU countries. Secondly, a health economic evaluation of the OptiBIRTH intervention was performed.

## Curriculum Vitae

Maaïke Fobelets, born on July 24th 1986 in Leuven. Graduated from the Katholieke Hogeschool Leuven with a Bachelor in Midwifery (2007) and from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel with a Master in Midwifery (2010). After obtaining clinical and research experience, she started her PhD at the Interuniversity Centre of Health Economics Research at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel in 2012. Her research is focussed on health economic questions in women's health.

Her PhD entitled 'aspects of health economic evaluations in perinatal care in an international context' was written in the context of the European OptiBIRTH project. OptiBIRTH is an innovative programme to encourage vaginal birth after caesarean based on different evidence based strategies. Since March 2017, she combines her academic research activities with a position as coordinator of the Brussels Integrated Care Knowledge Centre with researchers of the nursing and midwifery department at the Erasmus University College Brussels.

She was financed through the EU 7th Framework Programme for the health economic evaluation of the OptiBIRTH trial and was successful in obtaining several other grants: from the Vlaams Agentschap Zorg en Gezondheid for the health economic evaluation of screening prevention programmes in Flanders; from the Wetenschappelijk Fonds Willy Gepts for finalising her PhD; and at the Erasmus University College Brussels for the coordination the Brussels Integrated Care Knowledge Centre. The results obtained during this PhD trajectory were presented at several national and international scientific conferences.

She (co-)authored six peer-reviewed articles and contributed to several governmental reports. Next to her scientific work, she was active in different governance committees within the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and was president of the ISPOR student chapter of Belgium.