

Challenges And Experiences Of Primary Healthcare Providers During Initial Implementation Of Abortion Services At Family Planning Australia

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Background:

Despite moves to legalise Abortion in Australia, there is ongoing need to improve access to abortion care. Family Planning Australia (FPA), a non-government organisation, commenced abortion services in 2020, following New South Wales abortion decriminalisation. This study aims to assess the experiences of clinic staff during the implementation of abortion services, which can inform the both the implementation and ongoing improvement of primary care abortion services.

Methods:

Clinic staff (medical, nursing, allied health, administrative) involved in abortion services were invited to participate in 2 surveys (May 2020 - Apr 2021) with 1 follow-up interview after the 2nd survey to investigate their experiences of FPA abortion services.

Results:

Initial challenges reported included limited number of appointments available for abortion services, difficulties in ensuring recommended follow-up, and the complexity of steps required to organise appropriate abortion care with external service providers, especially during the COVID pandemic. Staff also reflected on factors which supported the adoption of this new scope of practice, including having a supportive team environment, the development of consultation support tools, engaging in regular feedback and quality improvement meetings and applying a multidisciplinary team management approach. Feedback provided by FPA staff included a desire to continue working towards removing remaining structural barriers for those accessing abortion care, streamline pathways and improve coordination and collaboration of services involved in abortion care. FPA staff also expressed an interest in continuous training to manage complex cases and to learn counselling strategies to support people seeking abortions.

Conclusion:

This evaluation showed that having a cohesive multidisciplinary team approach with ongoing professional development opportunities supported the implementation and integration of abortion services. The described challenges and successes during the implementation process of this study can inform the implementation of future services.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The authors declares that they have no relevant interests regarding the research described.