

Screening for alcohol and other drug use during pregnancy: exploring rates of detection and intervention during antenatal care visits.

Annette Briley^{1,2}, Robert Ali³, Megan Cooper¹, Lynette Cusack⁴, Matthew W.R. Stevens³

¹Caring Futures Institute Flinders University, Bedford Park, South Australia; ²Northern Adelaide Local Health Network, Lyell McEwin Hospital, Elizabeth, South Australia; ³School of Biomedicine, The University of Adelaide, Adelaide, South Australia; ⁴Adelaide Nursing School, The University of Adelaide, Adelaide, South Australia.

Presenter's email: Matthew.stevens@adelaide.edu.au

Introduction / Issues: Substance use during pregnancy carries significant risks to the developing fetus. Despite abstinence recommendations, some pregnant women continue to use. Therefore enquiry into substance use during antenatal clinic visits can facilitate early intervention. This study aims to investigate current practices around screening and early intervention, and identify gaps in staff knowledge which may be enhanced through training.

Method / Approach: First, a retrospective case-note audit of initial (booking) antenatal care visits to Lyell McEwin and Modbury Hospitals in South Australia, spanning April 2019 to September 2020, was conducted. Concurrently, all midwives working on rotation in those services (N=30), were approached to complete a training needs analysis (TNA) survey, which investigated knowledge, attitudes and beliefs towards caring for pregnant women who use drugs, using a battery of standardised measures.

Key findings: Overall, 93 records were randomly extracted, of which 33 (35.5%) included missing or incomplete substance-related data. Twenty midwives completed the survey, which revealed several knowledge gaps, including misunderstandings of health risks following various levels of tobacco consumption, and from switching to vaping nicotine. No midwife (0%) reported always asking about current tobacco smoking behaviour, while only 35% and 70% reported always asking about vaping and partner's smoking respectively. One participant (5%) reported never asking about tobacco smoking, while 50% and 20% reported never asking about vaping and partner's smoking respectively.

Discussion and conclusions: Poor screening rates may be due to a variety of factors including knowledge gaps and confidence to enquire about substance use. Future research will investigate the effect of delivery of a training module to build knowledge, skills and confidence to identify and intervene early for substance use issues as well as appropriate referral to treatment for substance-dependent pregnant women.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Substance use harms extend generationally. Early detection and intervention may improve health outcomes for unborn children. Additional findings and their implications will be discussed.

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