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Preconception health education and the impact on maternal and newborn health outcomes

Statement of the Problem: Maternal and newborn mortality continue to increase in the United States but may be preventable with comprehensive reproductive health education, prior to conception. Preconception health education begins in childhood, teaching health promotion across the life span, including proper diet, exercise and folic acid supplementation. Education and training needs to be presented, to health science students to promote healthfulness and promote an increased awareness about the importance of preconception health education. Health care providers should provide preconception health education during routine office visits, however, preconception health education is often not addressed. Among pregnant women, preconception health education decreases the incidence of hypertension and gestational diabetes. Preconception health education decreases the risk of neural tube defects, preterm delivery and poor health outcomes, in neonates. Gaps exist in curricula, regarding recommendations by governing agencies, about when to address preconception health education.

Aim: The aim is to evaluate if preconception health education could improve knowledge and promote changes in lifestyle practices of health science students.

Method: In order to educate health care providers about preconception health education, a study was performed with a face to face presentation to 71 health science students, at one university in California. Faculty and student knowledge deficits were addressed and faculty advisors were trained to help students educate peers and members of the community. Pretest-posttest data were collected using a 12-item instrument and analyzed using t-tests.

Results: Analyses of pretest and post-test data yielded a significant increase in knowledge among participants about preconception health education. Three theories were utilized in this study which included: The life course theory, theory of androgyny and diffusion of innovation theory.

Conclusion: It is required to introduce curricula regarding preconception health education among students. The introduction of preconception health education may improve health outcomes for pregnant women and neonates.

Biography

Terri Thompson has pursued her DNP from Western University of Health Sciences in Pomona, CA. She has specialized as a labor and delivery nurse for 21 years at a high-risk tertiary hospital. She is the Faculty Advisor for the Preconception Peer Education Club on campus at CBU and is an Advisor for the Office of Minority Health in Maryland.

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