The postpartum visit: An overlooked opportunity for prevention

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Abstract: Women's postpartum health needs affect the woman, her ability to care for her infant, and the health of babies she may have in the future. The postpartum visit provides an opportunity to help women transition from pregnancy to well-woman care, playing an important role in continuity of health services. This dissertation included a comprehensive literature review of the postpartum visit. Using the data from key informant interviews, surveys, and a chart review, this study examined factors that impact the postpartum visit provided by the University of North Carolina's Obstetric Program, including: (a) the health care system; (b) provider attitudes and practice; (c) the content of care; and (d) the woman's medical needs and access to care.

The study found that certain populations of patients are less likely to receive a postpartum visit and when they do receive a visit they receive fewer services than other mothers. The content of the visit is variable and not as complete as it could be. Postpartum screening for conditions such as gestational diabetes and hypertension warrants further attention. Communication among providers across the system is incomplete. Low-income mothers are likely to leave their postpartum visit without a plan in place for follow up services. The research determined that there are things that could be done within the UNC Obstetric Clinic to improve the postpartum visit and the care new mothers receive.

Eight recommendations for improvements were generated from this study, including: (1) developing a comprehensive interconception care initiative; (2) building a University-wide research consortium; (3) marketing the postpartum visit to mothers; (4) improving postpartum visit compliance by strengthening the continuity of care given by providers; (5) improving the information available about mothers at the postpartum visit by adopting an electronic prenatal medical record; (6) enhancing the quality of the postpartum visit by implementing improvement initiatives; (7) expanding the information mothers receive at the postpartum visit by increasing the number of educational materials they receive; and (8) linking low-income mothers back to local health departments and clinics after their postpartum visit. The postpartum visit is key in the journey toward improved interconception care for mothers.

Links: Linking Service

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