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Staying Healthy After Childbirth

A theory-based survey of UK and USA HCPs views on the promotion of smoking cessation and interrelated cancer preventative behaviours postpartum.

Introduction

Across the UK and USA, postpartum smoking relapse rates are high for women who quit smoking during pregnancy; up to 75% at 12 months1,2. Simultaneously, rates of exclusive breastfeeding and physical activity are low. These three cancer preventative behaviours have complex interactions; for example, smoking relapse often corresponds with discontinuing breastfeeding3, and breastfeeding can be seen as a barrier to physical activity4.

Study aim: Underpinned by the social ecological theoretical framework (Figure 1), Project HATCH aims to assess interrelated factors impacting continued smoking abstinence and increased rates of breastfeeding and physical activity among postpartum women.

Methodology

Project HATCH is a multimethod study including:

- Phase 1: A scoping review of existing postpartum support resources, and systematic literature review of interventions.
- Phase 2: A survey of healthcare professionals (HCPs)
- Phase 3: Qualitative focus groups with postpartum women
- Phase 4: Intervention development

Phase 2 of the study is presented here: An online survey of UK and USA health professionals to elicit their views on current practice relating to target behaviours (smoking relapse prevention, promotion of breastfeeding, physical activity), postpartum. We explored how health professionals rate the importance of these barriers and facilitators for each target behaviour and how the barriers and facilitators are related to each other across the three behaviours. In addition, data are presented on health professionals’ feedback about existing resources and ideas for future improvement.

Survey aim: Explore perceived facilitators and barriers of the cancer preventing target behaviours relating to each ecological subsystem of the social ecological framework (Figure 1).

Results: HCP’s importance ratings of socio ecological factors affecting the three target behaviours (smoking, breastfeeding, and physical activity)

Results: Existing resources identified by HCPs

- Textual support: websites, leaflets, and apps
- Telephone helpline support for breastfeeding and smoking
- Interactive online support: Forums and social media groups for breastfeeding and physical activity
- General and specific HCP support (e.g. lactation consultant, stop smoking advisor, women’s health physio)
- Peer support groups, walking/exercise groups, breastfeeding friendly cafes
- Pump loan and hire, smoking medication/NRT

Results: HCP Suggestions for interventions simultaneously targeting the three behaviours (not smoking, breastfeeding, and physical activity) categorised using social ecological theoretical framework

- Information on how the 3 target behaviours relate to each other
- App targeting all three behaviours and signposting to support
- HCPs helping mothers recognise that the postpartum period offers opportunity for positive lifestyle changes
- Information about combining behaviours e.g. how to fit in breastfeeding, what is safe exercising whilst feeding, encourage exercise as a distraction from smoking.
- Realistic antenatal provision addressing emotional challenges of parenthood
- Incentives for all three behaviours

Societal

- More state funding supporting mothers in postpartum period (e.g. children’s centres)
- Longer full maternity leave

Conclusion

Wellness and ability to engage in continued smoking abstinence, physical activity and breastfeeding in the postpartum period is affected by physical and sociocultural variables in the larger community environment. There is a need to support women across these interlinked cancer preventative behaviours, within their unique contexts, with potential to significantly impact both maternal and child long-term health outcomes. The results of the survey will contribute to the wider aim of Project HATCH to develop a prototype intervention to target continued abstinence from smoking, along with increased breastfeeding and physical activity among postpartum women.

References