Plan, Do, Study, Act: partnering for quality improvement to address refugee perinatal health and health care inequalities

Christine East and the Bridging the Gap Partnership

BACKGROUND

Bridging the Gap is an NHMRC-funded partnership of 11 organisations spanning health services, government and research. The partnership has developed projects to address refugee inequalities through healthcare service reform and quality improvement. Here, we outline a quality initiative that was developed by the Bridging the Gap partnership. Around 2,600 women give birth annually at Dandenong Hospital, which is one of the three hospitals that form Monash Women’s Maternity Services within Monash Health, Victoria. Over two thirds of the women attending Dandenong Hospital were born outside Australia and 19% identify as requiring an interpreter. Local Afghan families reported limited use of professional interpreters in labour and health professional identified challenges when family members interpreted.

RESEARCH AIMS

We aimed to improve the engagement of professional interpreters for women giving birth at Dandenong Hospital.

TRANSITIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS AND HEALTH SERVICE USERS THROUGH KNOWLEDGE IN ACTION

We translated existing knowledge into action to enable health professionals to transition through competency development and assist women accessing our maternity services to transition through the life event of childbirth.

METHOD

A multidisciplinary group co-designed this quality initiative and implemented it with birth suite midwives using the plan-do-study-act (PDSA) framework to test out cycles of change. Women were offered an interpreter when they were in early labour – a time when communication needs are often greatest and before clinical escalation. The initiative was modified over a number of PDSA cycles.

RESULTS

Prior to this initiative, only 28% of women who required an interpreter went on to have one during their labour. This improved to 62% within nine months of the PDSA cycles in 2015 and has been sustained in the intervening period since.

IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

We demonstrated that engaging a multidisciplinary planning team and the adoption of the PDSA framework to continuously improve the provision of language services to women of low English proficiency is feasible in a busy maternity service.

FUTURE RESEARCH PLANS

The success of this program has generated interest in its implementation at the other two Monash Women’s Maternity Services hospitals, and at maternity services across the state.

PUBLICATION DETAILS


Contact details for enquiries related to the project: Christine East, christine.east@monash.edu

Bridging the Gap Partnership website