

Entry Title
Aboriginal Antenatal Outreach Service – A collaboration program between Sydney West Area Health Service (SWAHS) and the Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) in Western Sydney
Abstract
<p>A collaborative partnership has been established between the Women’s & Children’s Service at Nepean Hospital and the Aboriginal Medical Service from Western Sydney.</p> <p>The partnership is unique and not reflected in any other area health service in NSW. The AMS Western Sydney/SWAHS partnership for service delivery has had a dramatic impact on the two target areas of care i.e. on the number of Aboriginal women presenting for antenatal care prior to 20 weeks gestation as well as the wellbeing of their newborn babies. Not only has this partnership increased engagement into health care services, improving maternal and perinatal outcomes for Aboriginal women, it has been enriching for the health care staff involved and allowed them to grow in their cultural awareness.</p>
Aim
To increase the number of pregnant aboriginal women accessing antenatal care services and reduce the use of illicit drug and smoking during pregnancy.
Nature of the Problem
<p>Studies indicate that a high proportion of Aboriginal women present late in pregnancy for their first antenatal visit and irregularly for their subsequent visits.</p> <p>This is largely due to the inappropriateness and inaccessibility of mainstream antenatal services for many Aboriginal women, resulting in inadequate monitoring of pregnancies and less than optimal management of pregnancy complications. Despite this recognition, it has taken a long time to impact on these practices.</p> <p>The NSW Midwives Data Collection (MDC) in 2000 showed that 26% of aboriginal women presented after 20 weeks gestation for their first antenatal visit compared to 13% of non-Aboriginal women.</p>
Extent of the problem
<p>The lack of antenatal care sought by Aboriginal women impacts upon the wellbeing of their babies. The Review of Aboriginal Deaths Report (1998) examined the number of Aboriginal perinatal deaths that occurred in this twelve-month period and showed that over one third of mothers either had no antenatal care or fewer than two visits.</p> <p>Sydney West Area Health Service has the highest Aboriginal population in Metropolitan Sydney and the third highest Aboriginal population in New South Wales</p> <p>Lack of culturally appropriate antenatal care services was identified as major contributing factor in reducing Aboriginal perinatal morbidity and mortality.</p>
Strategic importance
<p>The provision of health services to the local Aboriginal community depends on additional factors that can make a difference. In 1997, a formal partnership agreement was signed between AMS Western Sydney (formerly Daruk AMS) and Sydney West Area Health Service (formerly Wentworth Area Health Service and Western Sydney Area Health Service).</p> <p>This partnership supports the delivery of quality health care by ensuring equity and access are provided, with all parties primarily working towards improving the health status of all Aboriginal people residing in western Sydney (AMS Western Sydney 2007). This concept aligns with strategic direction four: Build regional and other partnerships for health.</p>
Planning and implementing solutions
Under the existing partnership agreement, a Midwife, an Obstetric & Gynaecology Staff Specialist from Nepean Hospital travel to AMS Western Sydney to work together with the AMS Midwife, a General Practitioner and an Antenatal Aboriginal Health Worker to provide

culturally appropriate antenatal care.

This service is provided weekly and is delivered under a primary health care framework where each woman is cared for within the context of her family and social situation.

The service builds on the relationship developed during the pregnancy providing physical, social and emotional support for women and their families with a flexible and non-judgemental approach, and provides a culture of antenatal care which is a model for well woman care throughout life encouraging the women to take more responsibility for their own health.

Some of the strategies implemented include:

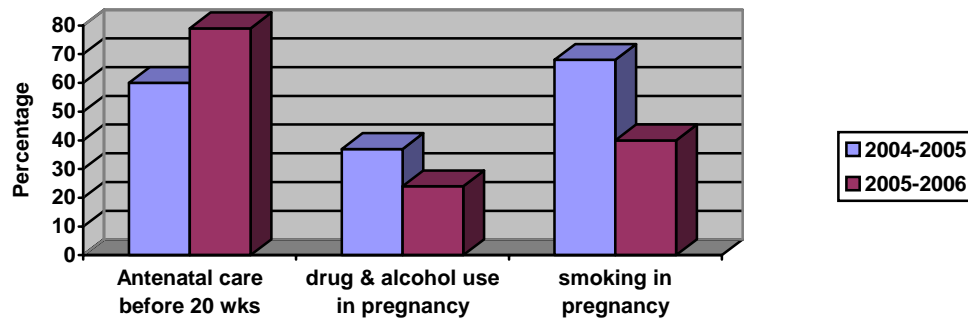
- Bi-monthly liaison meetings occur between SWAHS and AMS Western Sydney key stakeholders to monitor the appropriateness of services delivered and to enhance effective service co-ordination, so it continues to reflect the needs of the local Aboriginal community
- Postnatal referral of Aboriginal women to the AMS for follow-up care (with women's consent), along with appropriate referral for the infants and other children
- Development of culturally sensitive clinical pathways to respond to the Aboriginal women's needs. They address aspects of antenatal care; intrapartum care, postnatal hospital and community care along with care of the newborn and infant.
- Allied health workers become involve in the management of high-risk pregnancies to address issues such as mental health, drug and alcohol use, diabetes, hypertension and renal disease to ensure holistic care is provided
- A system for notifying AMS on their clients has been developed at Nepean Hospital and this ensures the continuum of care throughout the patient's journey
- Provision of work placements for indigenous workers in the field of Child and Family Health

Outcomes and Evaluation

From 1990-1996, only 36% of Aboriginal pregnant women presented in the first trimester of their pregnancy for antenatal care.

Following implementation of interventions and the development of strong partnerships, the following improvements are noted:

- An increase of 19% of Aboriginal pregnant women attending pre-natal care before 20 weeks gestation (60% in 2004-05 to 79% in 2005-06)
- A reduction of 13% of Aboriginal pregnant women using illicit drug and alcohol use during pregnancy (37% in 2004-05 to 24% in 2005-06)
- A reduction of 28% of Aboriginal pregnant women smoking during pregnancy (68% in 2004-05 to 40% in 2005-06)
- In 2005-06 4 out of 60 births were only delivered prior to 36 weeks and only 7 babies were <2.5kg at birth. These are major milestones that impact on the wellbeing of the newborn.
- A greater understanding and co-operation between Nepean Hospital staff and the Aboriginal community.



Sustaining change

The first formal evaluation of this service (although undertaken in 1998) concluded that the antenatal program made a valuable contribution to improving maternal and perinatal outcomes for Aboriginal women in western Sydney. Whilst there has been no further formal evaluation, the service continues to submit data for Statewide and National reporting systems.

A continuous and steady improvement on the numbers of women presenting for antenatal care, clinical pathways and referral patterns continues to occur and perinatal outcomes continue to improve. This improvement has been noted across SWAHS services and extended to other facilities such as Blacktown Hospital.

Future Scope

As a consequence of the partnership, the staff at Nepean Hospital has become more aware of Aboriginal cultural needs and have incorporated those into their every day practice. The partnership has been enriching for all staff involved both from Nepean Hospital and AMS Western Sydney. There is growing awareness of Aboriginal cultural needs as a result of this project, it provides a scope to extend this to health care providers to link Aboriginal women into other community support services, as well as provides comprehensive medical management of pregnancy complications.

References

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