Enhanced Substance Use Screening in the Prenatal Clinic

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BACKGROUND
- Substance use in pregnancy has been linked to a devastating hardship to care delivery in the United States (Hotham, Ali, & White, 2015).
- The influx of substance abuse cases causes a potential barrier to care due to limited resources, increased healthcare costs, and separation of the maternal and fetal dyad post-birth.
- Early recognition is important as women who use substances during pregnancy have a greater risk of preterm births, low birth rates, intrauterine growth restriction (IUGR), and other complications (Scott, Shieh, Umoren, & Conrad, 2017).
- The under-utilization of a standardized screening process in the clinic setting can lead to substance use and abuse being overlooked in the antenatal period and may result in negative maternal and fetal outcomes (Artigas, 2014).
- With early identification of substance use in pregnancy, the provider has the opportunity to offer supportive services that can assist the woman towards the goal of abstinence and can help women achieve their most optimal state of health.

EVIDENCE
- Every pregnant woman should be screened for substance abuse in pregnancy as part of a thorough obstetrical intake history and physical exam (American Academy of Obstetrics and Gynecology [ACOG], 2015).
- Women should be screened equally and without prejudice, ensuring there is no discrimination against any ethnicity, belief system, or social class (ACOG, 2017).
- With early intervention, women can overcome addiction by receiving the appropriate care needed to successfully attend to their babies in the postpartum period and maintain an optimal state of abstinence (Association of Women’s Health, Obstetrics, and Neonatal Nurses, 2015).

PURPOSE
This study investigates the use of a substance abuse screening tool (The 4 Ps) to increase recognition of women affected by prenatal substance use and abuse. Improved screening allows health care providers to offer supportive services in a timely manner and to promote abstinence long-term.

METHODS
- A protocol for substance use screening in prenatal patients was created.
- Staff were trained on the use of the protocol in combination with the 4Ps Substance Abuse Screening Tool.
- Each patient seen for a routine obstetric visit was screened using the 4 Ps for Substance Abuse screening tool and patients with positive screening results were offered referral to supportive community services.
- Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and retrospective chart reviews.
- Results of the substance abuse screening tool were evaluated using SPSS Software.
- Using a Plan-Do-Study-Act quality improvement model, use of the protocol was reassessed throughout implementation.
- Staff retraining was completed as necessary.

RESULTS
- A total of 164 OB patients were seen in the clinic setting during the project implementation timeframe and followed using the newly implemented screening protocol.
- The use of the 4 Ps for Substance Abuse screening tool led to 66% of pregnant women screened for substance use and abuse.
- Of those who screened positive, 11% identified as past users of alcohol or substances, while others identified as having smoked cigarettes (15 %), or drank alcohol and/or used substances (13%) within the month before pregnancy was confirmed.
- Pregnant women also identified having a parent (12%) or partner (4%) who had a problem with alcohol or drugs.
- Of women who screened positive, 100% were offered supportive services via community resources with 57% of followed through with community substance use/abuse services.

RELEVANCE TO PRACTICE
- Screening for substance use and abuse is imperative to identify women at risk and decrease prenatal morbidity and mortality.
- Use of a validated screening tool during the prenatal care visit provides opportunity to open discussions with mothers regarding the negative impacts of substance use on their health and the health of their unborn child.
- Offering women guidance, support, follow-up, and access to resources in the hospital and community can lead to cost-effective savings for the healthcare system by preventing the consequences of substance abuse.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS
- Screen every pregnant woman for substance abuse in pregnancy with a validated tool
- Ensure screening is done in a non-biased and non-discriminatory manner
- Offer supportive services to those women in need in order to help them achieve abstinence
- Help healthcare settings establish protocols that incorporate screening into their clinical practice guidelines

References