INTENSIFYING MONITORING AND CARE OF PRETERM AND LOW BIRTH WEIGHT BABIES AT THYOLO DISTRICT HOSPITAL - MALAWI

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BACKGROUND

Prematurity refers to baby being born before 37 completed weeks of gestation and low birth weight is weight at birth of less than 2500 grams. Thyolo District Hospital’s records of 2017 indicated that 119 babies were admitted to the neonatal unit with weight of 1000 – 1500 grams, and 31% (n= 37) died. Contributing factors included: inadequate monitoring, lack of resources, lack of protocols and inappropriate feeding methods. Therefore this project was initiated at Thyolo District Hospital.

PURPOSE

The project aimed at reducing neonatal death due to prematurity and low birth weight complications from 31% to 10% in 18 months through utilization of best practices in the care of preterm and low birth weight babies.

METHODS

An interprofessional team comprising of midwives, clinicians, and support staff was formed. The following interventions were implemented:

- Intensified monitoring and care of preterm and low birth weight babies through utilization of monitoring on feeding charts
- Developed protocols and guidelines on monitoring of babies, feeding methods, infection prevention, and prevention and management of hypothermia
• Intensified health education to mothers on the care of preterm babies, including feeding method, prevention of hypothermia and infection prevention
• Mobilized resources such as feeding tubes, suction tubes, pulse oxymeters, hats, and infection prevention buckets
• Conducted trainings on care of preterm babies to all care providers
• Provided mentorship for staff in three health centers
• Monitoring was done through monthly case reviews and gaps identified were addressed accordingly.

RESULTS

Preliminary results from July 2018 – February 2019 showed reduction in neonatal deaths due to prematurity complications from 31% (n=37) to 28% (n=20). The interventions are ongoing.

CONCLUSION

Adhering to standards of care for preterm and low birth weight babies can improve survival and prevent prematurity complications. It is important to follow developed guidelines in caring for preterm and low birth weight babies. There is need for collaboration amongst all team members and continued management support in terms of human and material resources, as well as supportive supervision to peripheral health facilities.

IMPLICATIONS

An interprofessional quality improvement initiative is important for standards of care for premature and low birth weight babies to be integrated into practice. Eventually this contributes to Sustainable Development Goal of reducing neonatal mortality.

KEY WORDS

Maternal and child health, Prematurity and low birth weight, Preterm and Low Birth weight care standards

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ETHICAL APPROVAL

Authority to conduct the project was granted by Thyolo District Hospital management.