

Care of Women Who Have Experienced a Stillbirth: A Quality Improvement Project

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Background:

Evidence has shown that the care rendered to women experiencing stillbirths influences their grieving process (Saflund, Sjogren & Wredlin, 2004:137). Thus, it is important to improve the quality of the education of midwives on bereavement care. Globally there are 2.6 million stillbirths occurring every year (WHO 2016:12) with 7500 stillbirths occurring daily (WHO 2016: Online). The labour ward of an inner city hospital in South Africa reports up to three stillbirths a month. Midwives in the labour ward reported feeling ill-equipped to appropriately care for women who experienced stillbirths.

Purpose:

The purpose of this project was to improve the quality of care of women who experienced stillbirths.

Methods:

To get permission and buy-in, a presentation was made to hospital management. Midwives were trained by a professional bereavement care counselor on supportive steps to follow during and immediately after the birth of a stillborn baby. A checklist was formulated based on the Canadian Pediatric Society statement on perinatal loss. Midwives were educated on how to collect birth mementoes. The team then compiled a memento booklet to be given to every bereaved mother.

Results:

During the initial training, some midwives reported symptoms of compassion fatigue. Midwives who participated in the project indicated that it helped them to express empathy to bereaved mothers. They felt that the memento booklet allowed mothers to take the memories of their babies home as opposed to leaving empty-handed. The midwives made suggestions for some changes in the booklet to make it user-friendly and practical. The practice of providing birth mementoes has been integrated in the ward policy on the care of women experiencing perinatal loss. Much appreciation and deep gratitude is verbalized by the bereaved women, and the midwives indicate that they feel empowered in the care of these women. They consider the memento booklet as valuable and important.

Conclusion:

It is important to empower midwives in the care of bereaved women, and to create memento booklets is a valuable and practical way of supporting them.

Implications:

It was evident that the success of a quality improvement project of this nature is dependent on the support from hospital management, as it implies policy changes, as well as training opportunities that have to be created, and even if it is low cost, there are still some expenses involved in the memento booklets.

Key words:

Maternal and Child Health, Stillbirths and bereavement, Memento booklets