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A Pilot Study for Enhancing Postpartum Discharge Instructions for Incision Care: Assessment of Comprehension

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Introduction

- Literacy and Health Care
  - 14.5% of United States is illiterate1
  - Reading level of most medical forms is 10th grade2

- Improving Outcomes with a Visual Aid
  - Cesarean Surgical Site Infection (SSI) rate is 5%3
  - A patient with a SSI can be 2 times as expensive4
  - Visual aids improve information recall5 and confidence in wound care3

- Study Objectives
  1. To evaluate the readability of the cesarean wound care discharge instructions relative to the patient population’s reading level
  2. To conduct a pilot Randomized Control Trial (RCT) to evaluate the effectiveness of a visual aid on improving comprehension of the cesarean wound care instructions

Methods

- Objective 1: Discharge Instruction Evaluation
  - Patient Reading Level Test: REALM
  - Three readability assessments:
    - Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Test
    - SMOG Readability Test
    - Fry Readability Test

- Objective 2: RCT conducted on the postpartum floor of Thomas Jefferson University Hospital (TJUH)
  - Participants: postpartum cesarean patients ages 18-50 (excluded patients who were non-native English speakers)
  - Randomized to receive the current written discharge instructions with (intervention) or without (control) a corresponding visual aid
  - Study Procedures:
    - Review discharge instructions
    - Standard teach back
    - Comprehension quiz
    - REALM
    - Demographic survey
    - 2 Week follow up comprehension quiz
    - Visual aid offered to controls

Results

- Readability Assessments
  - Discharge Instruction Readability Evaluation
    - Flesch-Kincaid: 6.4
    - SMOG: 11
    - Fry: 8.3
    - 8.6th Grade
  - Participant Reading Level Evaluation
    - REALM: 18% (6/32) of participants read at a 7-8th grade level
    - Demographic Survey: 44% (14/32) ≤ High School

- Visual AidRCT – Preliminary Results
  - Immediate Comprehensive Assessment ≤ High School
  - No difference in comprehension scores
  - Figure 2 – CONSORT Diagram

Table 1 – Participant Characteristics. Parity, prior abdominal surgery, and BMI also did not differ between study groups.

Table 2 – Comprehension Quiz Results

Other Results

- Married participants were 23.2 times more likely to score ≥90% in either comprehension assessment.
- 64% (7/11) controls requested to have the visual aid upon study completion

Conclusions

- Readability Assessment: The written instruction reading grade level is too high.
  - Currently ≥8-9th grade while 18% of participants read at 7-8th grade
  - 15% of patients evaluated for participation were excluded due to language barriers, suggesting that a higher percentage reads below the 8-9th grade level

- Visual Aid RCT: The visual aid did not affect comprehension.
  - There is a need for improved patient education (majority unable to score ≥90%)
  - Marriage was the only characteristic associated with better scores
  - Visual aid may improve patient satisfaction
  - Limitations:
    - Exclusion of non-native English speakers
    - Participation bias
    - Knowledge of a comprehension assessment
    - Multiple choice format of comprehension assessment
  - Future studies:
    - Include non-native English speakers
    - Free response format of comprehension questions
    - Formally assess patient satisfaction

Public Health Implications

- There is a need for improved cesarean wound care education.
- Based on the REALM results, of the English speaking cesarean patients at TJUH, 18% read at a 7-8th grade reading level.
- Information in medical charts and perceptions of care providers regarding a patient’s language may be misleading.
- Incorporating a visual aid into the discharge education process may improve patient satisfaction and can be feasibly included.

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