Health Education towards Abnormal Vaginal Discharge: Public Health Midwives' Challenges

Authors: I. M. P. S. Ilankoon, C. S. E. Goonewardena, R. C. Fernandopulle, P. P. R. Perera

Abstract: Introduction: Gynaecological problems are not confined to special clinic-based populations, but are widespread within the community. Abnormal vaginal discharge is a common gynaecological complaint among women aged 15 to 49 years. Public Health Midwife (PHM) is the available family health care provider at the grass root level in Sri Lankan health care system who can address women’s health issues. This study was carried out to assess PHMs’ knowledge on vaginal discharge, attitudes, and present health education activities related to vaginal discharge. Methods: This community based cross sectional study was conducted among all consenting PHMs who work in Medical Officer of Health areas in Colombo District, Sri Lanka. Data were collected over a period of five months (January - May 2015) by using a self-developed, validated, pretested self-administered questionnaire. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Data were analyzed by using SPSS software version 16, and descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used. Results: A total of 308 PHMs participated in the study, and the mean age was 40.69 years (SD ± 10.72). Nearly half of the participants have worked as a PHM for more than 11 years. Majority of PHMs expressed that they mainly perform health education during home visits (72.7%) and at clinics (66.2%). They engaged in health education on disease conditions and their consequences (30.2%), and personal hygiene (11.4%) in addition to maternal and child health services. The source of information regarding vaginal discharge was mentioned as during midwifery training (87.7%), from In-service education (53.6%), and media (32.5%). Mean knowledge score regarding vaginal discharge, causes and its management were 53.6 (SD ± 12.43). Only few participants (3.2 %) had good knowledge on vaginal discharge while 48% of participants obtained poor knowledge. Lack of knowledge was observed in the areas of reproductive tract infections and causes for pathological vaginal discharge. The mean knowledge scores were significantly higher among those who had less than 40 years of age (p = 0.004) and work experience less than 15 years (p = 0.002) to their counterparts. Ninety seven percent of participants agreed that educate females on vaginal discharge is one of their primary responsibilities, and 93% agreed to improve their knowledge on vaginal discharge and reproductive tract infections. Nearly 17% of participants rated their competency in providing health education on vaginal discharge as poor. Lack of available time (84.7%), lack of teaching materials (75%) and existence of anxiety and shyness in asking questions or revealing health problems among women at community (73.4%) were found to be the major challenges faced during health education activities. Conclusions: The health care provider’s level of knowledge of a disease is an important factor in providing quality health education. Although the PHMs showed motivation towards health education at community level, insufficient level of knowledge was found among this study sample. Thus, there is a need of upgrading their knowledge and skills as a strategy to meet the growing demand for quality health education and referral activities at community level.

Keywords: health education, knowledge, public health midwives, vaginal discharge

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