Implementing a Pregnancy Smoking Cessation Program: Challenges and Recommendations from the First Six Months of TIPS

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BACKGROUND

In 2007, funding was awarded to ETSU to implement and evaluate the Tennessee Intervention for Pregnant Smokers (TIPS) Program. The objective of this four year project is to improve birth outcomes in Northeast Tennessee by decreasing pregnancy smoking and smoke exposure. Regional physicians are trained in a Brief Intervention (BI) for smoking cessation based on the 5 A’s that is incorporated into all prenatal visits involving a smoke-exposed pregnancy. Additionally, intensive case management services are offered at half of the regional obstetric practices. A comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the program will be performed.

OBJECTIVES

The aims of the current report are to:
(1) describe the challenges to initial program implementation
(2) develop recommendations for overcoming the identified challenges in this and similar projects

RESULTS

• Six months after project start-up, only the two university affiliated prenatal care providers are participating:
  ✓ each has a full time case manager on site
  ✓ both have completed physician training in the 5 A’s (39 providers trained) and have incorporated smoking cessation counseling into prenatal care

• None of the private practices responded to our initial contact. However, using multiple modes of communication (letters, phone calls, email), we have had at least preliminary discussions with all practices

• Hesitation about project involvement has followed several response themes:
  ✓ concerns related to additional practice responsibilities
  ✓ financial burdens
  ✓ time limitations
  ✓ compensation issues
  ✓ space availability
  ✓ confidentiality of both the patient and practice
  ✓ concerns related to research involvement
  ✓ doubts about patient compliance using any smoking cessation intervention

• Reluctance of provider groups to participate has persisted, despite their recognition of the significant benefits for their practices and the women they serve

• Project staff have had to be persistent and creative, having explored insurance reimbursement and financial incentives in order to entice participation, in addition to involving already participating physicians and other professionals in the recruitment efforts

CONCLUSIONS

✓ The start up of a project requiring participation from physicians across a large regional area poses significant challenges, many of which cannot be anticipated at the outset.
✓ Physician involvement is essential to this type of intervention, and practitioners need to recognize that benefits of involvement far outweigh any drawbacks.
✓ Finding the most appropriate and effective way to communicate with and entice each individual practice is key.
✓ Future efforts should recognize the need for flexibility, in terms of efforts required, timeline, and budgetary allocations when implementing a project of this scope.

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