Pain relief during labour: a quality improvement project to enhance informed consent

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Introduction

- Obtaining informed consent for procedures such as epidurals in labouring women is ethically challenging.
- Decision-making capacity may be compromised by distractions including pain, anxiety and pre-medication [1].
- A solution is to provide relevant and reliable information to women prior to hospital admission, an approach which can improve informed decision-making and patient satisfaction [2].

Methods

- After an initial survey of 50 antenatal and postnatal women, we created an information leaflet of analgesic options available at our trust with feedback from obstetric, midwifery and anaesthetic leads.
- The leaflet was uploaded to our trust website and the Badgernotes app library, together with links to LabourPains.com, the OAA-affliated website.
- These were publicised to women with the help of community midwives and posters distributed in the antenatal departments (Figure 1).
- A follow-up survey of 50 women was carried out 6 months later.



Figure 1 – Poster distributed in antenatal departments

Results

- The initial survey revealed 74% women would have liked more information on their pain relief options. Some highlighted the lack of information specific to the hospital. Only 2% had heard of LabourPains.com.
- In the follow-up survey, 2.5x more women felt well informed, 10-fold more women were aware of LabourPains.com and 20% had read the new leaflet.
- Feedback on our leaflet was positive. 81% found it useful or would have read it had they known about it (Table 1).

Table 1 – Results of surveys	Initial survey (% women)	Follow-up survey (% women)
Felt well informed about pain relief options in labour	24	60
Would have liked more information on pain relief options	74	8
Had heard of LabourPains.com	2	20
Had read our new leaflet	N/A	20
Felt our leaflet was useful / would read if they had known about it	N/A	81

Discussion

- We have made progress in better informing women of their pain relief options in advance of labour, with our new online information leaflet and through raising awareness of LabourPains.com.
- Community midwife engagement is a major factor in getting these resources to expectant mothers, which we are continuing to develop with interdisciplinary meetings.
- This next step will help us refine and improve access to this tool, empowering women to make more informed decisions when the time comes.

References

1. Wada K et al. Can women in labor give informed consent to epidural analgesia? Bioethics 2019; May 33(4):475-486
2. Cheng W-C et al. Satisfaction in parturients receiving epidural analgesia after prenatal shared decision-making intervention: a prospective, before-and-after cohort study. BMC pregnancy childbirth 2020; Jul 20(1):413.