Digitalising patient information in obstetric anaesthesia during the covid-19 pandemic.

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Introduction

Social distancing during the covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted how we provided our patients with information about anaesthesia for childbirth. Face-to-face antenatal anaesthetic consultations were limited in the early phase of the pandemic and personal protective equipment (PPE) meant that long and detailed discussions around the benefits and possible complications of neuraxial analgesia in labour was challenging. Not satisfied with this, we asked our patients how happy they were with the information received regarding their anaesthetic options, in order to improve our patient information service as we navigate our way out of the pandemic.

Method

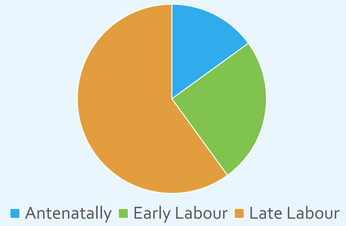
We asked 50 patients on the post-natal suite at the Royal Victoria Infirmary who had undergone a first time elective caesarean section under spinal anaesthesia, or who had received a first time epidural in labour, questions about the information they received about pain relief for childbirth. Ethics approval was not required for this project as advised by the clinical effectiveness department of the trust.

Results

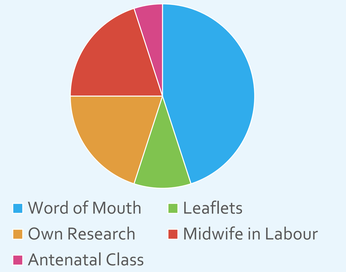
Sixty percent of patients surveyed decided late in their labour to have an epidural, with only 15% deciding antenatally and 25% in early labour. Forty-five percent of patients based their decision on whether or not to have an epidural on information received by word of mouth antenatally, 20% by doing their own research, 20% on what their midwife told them in labour, ten percent on information from leaflets and five percent on information from antenatal classes. 40% of patients felt anxious about the epidural placement and 75% would have liked more information earlier.

Thirty-five percent of patients undergoing elective caesarean section stated that they received their information about spinal anaesthesia by word of mouth, 20% from obstetric clinic, ten percent from leaflets and 20% said that they had no information prior to the day of surgery. Fifty-five percent stated that they did not know what to expect on the day of surgery and 35% said that they did not know what having a spinal entailed. 85% felt anxious about the procedure and 85% would have liked more information earlier.

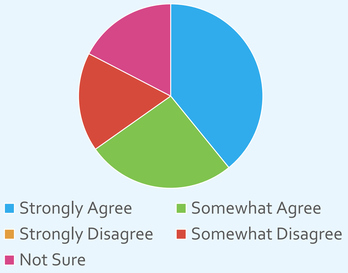
When did you decide to have an epidural?



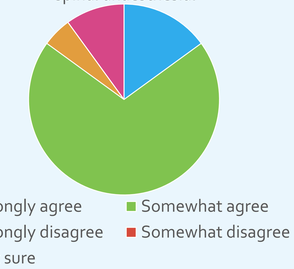
Where did you receive information about epidurals?



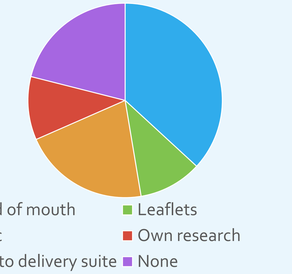
I would have liked more information about epidurals, earlier.



I would have liked more information about spinal anaesthesia.



Where did you receive information about spinals for caesarean section ?



Discussion

The information received about anaesthesia antenatally was inadequate for informed decision making . We have therefore created two videos which will be made available online to patients. One details a patient's journey through theatre for an elective caesarean section under spinal anaesthesia and the other a patient undergoing an epidural in labour. Our aim is that they will provide accurate, trust specific information to patients, which can be accessed at any stage of pregnancy to aid decision making around anaesthesia and analgesia for childbirth. We hope this will empower women to make fully informed decisions earlier in their pregnancy and will also bring our department into line with the NHS' vision to digitalise patient information.

Screenshot from our video, "Your spinal anaesthetic for your caesarean birth"



Screenshot from our video, "Epidurals for pain relief during Labour"

