

Optimizing Prenatal HIV Testing in Ontario: The OPHTIO Project

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Ontario is witnessing increasing proportions of HIV infections occurring among young women, Aboriginal women, and women from countries where HIV is endemic. Further, an increasing number of new infections are attributed to heterosexual contact. This increasing heterosexually-transmitted HIV infection rate among women has implications for prenatal testing. An effective prenatal HIV counselling and testing program has the potential to successfully increase the ability of women to make informed decisions about their own and their child's health in relation to HIV.

In 1999, Ontario revised its Prenatal HIV Testing Programme (PHTP) to require physicians and midwives to undertake HIV pre-test counseling and to offer voluntary HIV antibody testing to all pregnant women and women planning a pregnancy. An evaluation report of the PHTP entitled [Testing Times: Ontario's Prenatal HIV Testing Programme: Application, Acceptability and Advancement](#) resulted in a number of recommendations including the suggested need for more knowledge of women's experience of the PHTP, and thus formed the impetus for this study.

Objectives

- To explore and document the experiences of women who tested positive for HIV, either during pregnancy as part of PHTP or post-pregnancy, while they were living in Ontario and since the implementation of the PHTP;
- To document women's suggestions regarding the best way to optimize the program for future pregnant women including best practices for pre-test and post-test counselling;
- To qualitatively characterize women's perspectives on the post-diagnosis information and referrals that were offered and accepted; and
- To quantitatively characterize the outcome of women's pregnancies and the treatment information they were offered and accepted.

Methods

Qualitative

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with women in Ottawa and Toronto who became pregnant after implementation of the PHTP and who had been diagnosed with HIV through prenatal testing or shortly after giving birth.

Quantitative

Upon receipt of consent from the women, reviews of their and their children's medical charts were conducted to gather information pertaining to maternal history, prenatal care, documentation of HIV test counselling and consent and the child's circumstances around HIV testing and diagnosis.

Results

Seventeen interviews were conducted between October 2006 and June 2007 with women living in Ottawa and Toronto. Thematic analysis was conducted and findings have been summarized in a research project report.

More info

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