

PROMOTING RESPECTFUL MATERNITY CARE RESOURCE PACKAGE

MATERNITY OPEN DAYS: CLARIFYING MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT CHILDBIRTH

Maternity Open Days provide an opportunity for pregnant women and their families to interact with health care providers and visit the maternity unit to demystify birthing practices and mitigate any fears regarding childbirth in a facility.

WHY MATERNITY OPEN DAYS?

Fear of disrespect and abuse (D&A) and misconceptions about the procedures required to assist women during childbirth negatively influence their decisions to seek care at a health facility. This approach brings together women, their families and providers to enable pregnant women to understand what happens in a maternity unit. Misunderstandings, myths and misconceptions of the birthing process were indicated in the baseline findings:

- Some clinical aspects of labor, delivery and postnatal care were perceived as disrespectful by men and women

“Once the doctor conducts a vaginal examination (VE), he should wait till you call, he should not keep doing that exam ...that is why I went in late labor to avoid the VE” –MOTHER

“The machine with a lot of light [incubator] dries the baby’s brain resulting in retardation” –MOTHER

- The consequences of this result in fear of clinical procedures. Providers may also lack empathy and perceive women as being uncooperative

“You can ask a mother to relax for you to conduct the VE, but she instead closes her legs...so how do you monitor her labor?” – PROVIDER

This intervention is part of the respectful maternity care (RMC) Resource Package developed by the partners of the Kenya Heshima Project and focuses on policy, health system and community levels. The package includes the most effective interventions, and provides practical, low cost, and easily adaptable strategies for facilities and communities to reduce disrespectful and abusive treatment during childbirth. RMC refers to the humane and dignified treatment of a childbearing woman throughout her pregnancy, birth, and the postnatal period.

HOW TO HOLD A MATERNITY OPEN DAY

- Agree on a suitable date for the open day with health facility managers and community leaders
- Send invitations through the existing community information systems
- Invite pregnant women and their families to visit the maternity unit in order to share information on labor and delivery procedures
- Arrange simple refreshments to be made available (if possible)
- Offer screening for other diseases (cervical and prostate cancer) to encourage attendance
- Invite community leaders and health providers to speak about care and treatment in the maternity unit. Allow for discussion to try and dispel any misconceptions or rumors.
- During the maternity unit tour, ensure that privacy and confidentiality of mothers in labor are maintained.
- Following a tour of the maternity units, midwives and other health care providers engage with community members through a question and answer session about what women should expect when they come to give birth in the maternity units.



OBJECTIVES

Maternity Open Days are designed to:

- promote mutual understanding between community members and service providers
- Improve knowledge and demystify procedures during labor, childbirth and the immediate postnatal period

Over 3000 women and their families have attended maternity open days across the 13 study sites. Open days are now institutionalized in eight facilities as a part of routine activities to strengthen facility and community linkages:

- Maternity unit tours during ANC visits were also introduced in eight facilities.
- Increase in the number of men accompanying their partners
- Providers now recognize the importance of linking more closely with the communities



“We have included this in our annual work plan and will be funded by the government since we have established such a good relationship with the community that we want to continue”
—HEALTH MANAGER

“We are now talking to each other since they understand our limits” —PROVIDER

The Maternity Open Day approach is a promising practice in clarifying misconceptions and myths associated with facility-based childbirth

“.. I have seen...there are no ropes to tie one to the delivery bed during childbirth...”
—MAN QUOTING HIS WIFE

CONCLUSION: PROMISING PRACTICE

- Community members have embraced the Maternity Open Days
- There are more cordial relationships between providers and community members
- Helps to clarify myths and misconceptions associated with facility delivery
- Improved community's participation, particularly men, in the welfare of clients and staff within the maternity unit
- Maternity Open Days integrate other services to encourage participation e.g., health talks, CWC, and screening for prostate and cervical cancer

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