Considerations When Evaluating Studies on Birth Settings

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*Research Issues in the Assessment of Birth Settings*

• Organizational models of care delivery
• Workforce requirements
• Patient and provider satisfaction levels
• Birth outcomes
Panel 3: Birth Settings and Health Outcomes: State of the Science

- Alternative vs Conventional settings
- UK Collaborative Group Studies
- Process of Care
- Effect of Built environment
Panel 3: Birth Settings and Health Outcomes: State of the Science Alternative vs Conventional Settings

- Alternative settings impact (reduce) interventions

- Considerations:
  - Institutional norms and policies
  - Caregiver staffing/roles
  - Types of patients studied
Low Risk women: adverse perinatal outcome rare
  - Increased in nulliparous women planning to give birth at home

Interventions increased in hospital settings

Considerations:
  - Choice of birth setting & patient bias
  - Caregiver staffing/roles
Panel 3: Birth Settings and Health Outcomes: State of the Science: Process of Care

- Goal: fewer interventions
- Considerations:
  - Institutional policies
  - Caregiver staffing/roles
  - Selection bias
  - Outcomes measured
Panel 3: Birth Settings and Health Outcomes: State of the Science: Effect of Built Environment

• Environment affects
  • neuroendocrine immune interactions and physiologic response(s)
  • mental and physical health

• Considerations:
  • Data from non-obstetric populations
Considerations: Selection Bias

Women planning home births:
- Lower obstetric risk
- Later gestational age
- Desire less interventions
- Prefer specific care model(s)
Considerations: Study Design

- Few RCTs
- Inclusion/exclusion criteria
  - Definition of “low risk” & “normal”
- Timing of “delivery decision”
- Cohort and historical studies
  - Selection bias of population(s) studied
  - Outcomes measured
  - Institutional policies
Considerations: Outcomes

- Most report short-term outcomes
  - Apgar scores, mortality, hospital discharge
- Need long-term outcomes
  - Impact on reproductive health, gynecologic health, family and childhood outcomes
Considerations: Other

- Studies include women at low obstetric risk
  - Implications for those at increased risk unknown
- Availability of obstetrical services limited for some conditions (e.g., VBAC, vaginal breech)
- Understanding neural immune connections in obstetric populations
- Implications on workforce and settings
Considerations When Evaluating Studies on Birth Settings

- Evaluation of data must take into account limitations of available data
  - Patient selection bias
  - Study design(s)
  - Outcomes studied
Additional Considerations

- Limitations of generalizability of findings
  - Women at increased obstetrical risk
  - Unavailable obstetric services
- Organizational models of care
- Implications on workforce
- Many unanswered questions

Generalizability of findings --> Many questions remain unanswered
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