

ASSESSMENT OF REFERRALS TO A DISTRICT HOSPITAL MATERNITY UNIT IN SOUTH AFRICA

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DECLARATION

I, Mashishi Mathiba Maria declare that this research report on assessment of referrals to a district hospital maternity unit is my own work. It is being submitted for the degree of Masters in Public Health for Hospital Management at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. All the sources I have used and quoted were acknowledged by means of complete references. This report has not been submitted before for any degree at this university or any other institution.

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25 April 2012

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to:

My husband Stephen, for the great support, encouragement, understanding and patience rendered throughout my studies. No enough words to express my appreciation.

My children Tumelo, Neo, Rethabile and Tetelo; for their understanding, love, patience and support.

Finally administrative staff at Dilokong hospital for the support, understanding and assistance in retrieval of patient records during data collection.

ABSTRACT

Introduction

A functioning and effective referral system is essential to improve maternal care services. There are guidelines that identify the types of maternity care that should be provided at the different levels of care, and define referral pathways and appropriate management of patients at each level of care. Compliance with referral and patient management guidelines is important to ensure appropriate utilization of different levels of maternal care services, and to prevent maternal and peri-natal mortality. This study assesses the referral of pregnant women to Dilokong district hospital maternity unit for delivery, to evaluate the proportion of referred women who delivered at the appropriate level of care.

Methods

This was a descriptive cross sectional study involving retrospective review of hospital records for mothers who delivered in the maternity unit of Dilokong hospital during January to December 2008. Data were collected from 400 records using a data extraction sheet. Data were collected on demographic variables, clinical and obstetric history, distance to Dilokong hospital, and type of referral (self-referred or health professional referred). Analysis determined the appropriateness of referrals for delivery at the Dilokong hospital level of care.

Results

Most women delivering at the hospital maternity unit were self-referred and inappropriate for the level of care. A total of 333 women (85%) were self-referred and 57% were inappropriate for delivery at the hospital level of care. Most women used Dilokong hospital as their first contact with the health care system even though many lived closer to a clinic or CHC. Among self-referrals, only 121 (37%) were appropriate for delivery at the hospital level of care. The majority (74%) of health-professional referred women were appropriately referred for hospital delivery. The results also show that the majority (67%) and (53%) of self-referrals and inappropriate referrals respectively were brought to the hospital by ambulance.

Conclusion

This study shows that referral pathways are not functioning in line with referral guidelines for maternal care. The bypass of primary care facilities by most women in the study results in inappropriate utilization and potentially overloading of the hospital maternity unit. Non-compliance with referral guidelines defies the efficient functioning of health services. This could be addressed by developing mechanisms to improve and continuously monitor compliance; and doing further studies to determine the contributory factors, particularly for self-referrals.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| DECLARATION..... | i |
| DEDICATION | ii |
| ABSTRACT | iii |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | v |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS | vi |
| LIST OF FIGURES | ix |
| LIST OF TABLES | x |
| LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS | xi |
| | |
| CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 1.1. Background | 1 |
| 1.2. Problem statement | 4 |
| 1.3. Justification for the study | 5 |
| 1.4. Literature review | 6 |
| 1.5. Aim and objectives | 14 |
| | |
| CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY..... | 16 |
| 2.1. Study design | 16 |
| 2.2. Study setting | 16 |
| 2.3. Study population | 17 |
| 2.4. Sampling | 17 |
| 2.5. Measurement | 18 |
| 2.6. Data processing and analysis | 20 |

| | |
|---|----|
| 2.7. Ethical considerations | 20 |
| CHAPTER 3: RESULTS | 21 |
| 3.1. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE | 21 |
| 3.1.1. Age distribution | 21 |
| 3.1.2. Social profile | 22 |
| 3.2. OBSTETRIC PROFILE | 24 |
| 3.2.1. Parity and gravidity | 24 |
| 3.2.2. Previous and current medical condition..... | 25 |
| 3.2.3. Admission diagnosis | 25 |
| 3.3. REFERRAL TO DILOKONG HOSPITAL | 26 |
| 3.3.1. Types of referrals to Dilokong..... | 26 |
| 3.3.2. Appropriateness of referrals | 27 |
| 3.3.3. Socio-demographic factors associated with referrals to Dilokong..... | 30 |
| CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION..... | 34 |
| 4.1. Socio-demographic and clinical profile | 34 |
| 4.2. Types of referrals to Dilokong maternity unit | 34 |
| 4.3. Appropriateness of referrals to Dilokong maternity unit..... | 36 |
| 4.4. Limitations | 40 |
| CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS | 41 |
| 5.1. Conclusion | 41 |
| 5.2. Recommendations | 42 |

REFERENCES 45

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Data extraction sheet50

Appendix B: Authorization from Provincial Department of Health..... 53

Appendix C: Ethics Clearance certificate 54

LIST OF FIGURES

| Figure | | Page |
|--------|---|------|
| 1 | Referral type | 29 |
| 2 | High and low risk pregnancies before referral to Dilokong hospital | 31 |
| 3 | Appropriate and inappropriate referrals to Dilokong hospital | 31 |

LIST OF TABLES

| Table | | Page |
|-------|---|------|
| 1 | Age distribution of women who delivered at Dilokong hospital in 2008 | 24 |
| 2 | Marital status, employment status and access | 25 |
| 3 | Parity and gravidity distribution | 26 |
| 4 | Medical conditions in previous and current pregnancies | 27 |
| 5 | Admission diagnosis | 28 |
| 6 | Appropriateness of referrals to Dilokong hospital for delivery | 31 |
| 7 | Comparison of demographic and obstetric profile between appropriate and inappropriate referrals | 31 |
| 8 | Comparison of demographic and obstetric profile between self-referred and referred by health professional | 32 |
| 9 | Comparison of social profile between appropriate and inappropriate referrals | 33 |
| 10 | Comparison of social profile between self-referred and referred by health professional | 34 |

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------------|------------------------------------|
| ANC | African National Congress |
| CHCs | Community Health Centers |
| DHIS | District Health Information System |
| EmOC | Emergency obstetric care |
| EMS | Emergency Medical Services |
| MDGs | Millennium Development Goals |
| NDOH | National Department of Health |
| PHC | Primary Health Care |
| TB | Tuberculosis |
| WHO | World Health Organisation |