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Barrier, weakness and utilization of pre-pregnancy clinic services

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Abstract

Background: Despite being one of the plausible measures towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), various issues pertaining to pre-pregnancy clinic (PPC) services still need to be pondered upon. Based on this view, an attempt was made to identify and understand the barriers and weaknesses of current utilisation of pre-pregnancy care services, since its establishment and implementation in Sarawak from the year 2011.

Materials and methods: This cross-sectional study was conducted in selected health care facilities throughout Sarawak. A multistage cluster sampling technique was followed to select the health facilities. An unstructured open-ended questionnaire was administered as a part of quantitative data analysis. The open-ended questions were administered to get the in-depth perceived views and current practice of utilisation of pre-pregnancy clinic services. A total of 553 clients from nine selected health care facilities gave their feedback. The results of the study were narrated in textual form and a thematic analysis was done manually.

Results: The identified themes for perceived barriers for utilisation of pre-pregnancy care were perception, attitude and acceptance of PPC services, socio-economic issues, services and client factors. The perceived weaknesses of the services are listed under two main themes: working environment and service factors, whereas, the strength of services produced three thematic areas which are preparation for pregnancy, prevention of mortality and morbidity and comprehensive services.

Conclusions: Though there is ample evidence that pre-pregnancy services are beneficial for maternal health and wellbeing, various issues still need to be addressed for the improvement of the quality of services. Lack of awareness among clients, socio-economic barriers, lack of resources, organisational barriers and perceptions towards family planning issues are some of the issues which need to be addressed. Nonetheless, promotional and health educational activities are important keys; in ensuring the sustainability of the services.

Keywords: Barriers, Perception, Pre-pregnancy care, Sarawak

Background

Preconception care is aimed at identifying and modifying biomedical, behavioural and social risks through preventive and management interventions [1]. The major key components of preconception care are risk assessment and health promotion apart from the provision of medical and psychosocial interventions. Every woman should be prepared with their own reproductive life plan, based on their own values and resources [1].

Pre-conception care can be defined as “interventions that optimize women’s health before pregnancy with the

intent to improve maternal and newborn health outcomes” or “a set of interventions that aim to identify and modify biomedical, behavioural, and social risks to a woman’s health or pregnancy outcome through prevention and management” [2]. The main purpose of implementing the pre-pregnancy clinic (PPC) services is to prevent pregnancies which are unplanned, too early or too close [3].

Though pre-pregnancy care services were first established nationwide in the year 2002, which was later expanded to Sarawak in the year 2011, the rate of utilisation and knowledge pertaining to pre-pregnancy care among women in Malaysia remains unclear [4]. Moreover, those not utilising the service were having at least one chronic medical illness, which complicate their pregnancies and

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