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The use of handheld ultrasound by general physicians, midwives and Nurses to avert maternal deaths in 2 regions of the Philippines.@ ibuntis

Godofreda Vergeire-Dalmacion

Asian Hospital and Medical center, Philippines

Background and Objectives: One of the major reasons for the Philippines' high maternal ratio of 209 per 100,000 livebirths is the lack of primary health care and low contraceptive coverage. Thus, the functions of nurses, midwives and general physicians manning our health facilities must be expanded and optimized to the fullest. Using a cross sectional design we chose 2 municipalities from 2 regions of the Philippines, one rural and one urban with similar maternal mortality ratio. Our objectives were to train their health workers on the use of handheld ultrasound to identify 5 obstetrical conditions of women in their 20th to 24th weeks age of gestation which may lead to catastrophic pregnancy outcomes. The ultrasound readings of the trainees were compared with those made by an obstetrician- perinatologist, acting as gold standard. Training activities used lectures, modules, return demos and small group discussions.

Results: Four hundred sixty pregnant women were scanned. Thirty two percent of images were abnormal, namely, fetal malpresentation (27%) abnormal placentation (3.7%), twin pregnancy, (1.3%) and amniotic fluid volume abnormalities

(1.3%). All women with abnormal scans were subsequently referred to their health facilities and advised closer prenatal followups. Early ultrasound imaging will potentially avert 6.3% of maternal deaths and 28.0% of neonatal deaths. In our study, we had 3 cases of neonatal deaths, 2 from congenital anomalies and 1 from dysfunctional labor secondary to neglected breech. The latter was actually diagnosed by the team but patient opted for home delivery. The agreement between the health workers readings with the gold standard was 100% for the number of fetuses, 99% for placental localization and amniotic fluid volume and 95% for fetal presentation specifically breech versus cephalic.

Conclusion: Screening ultrasound between 20th to 24th weeks AOG can detect a high number of abnormal ultrasound images and can potentially avert maternal and neonatal deaths. Community health workers are trainable and reliable in the use of handheld ultrasound on five important obstetrical parameters. However, knowledge alone is not enough to improve health seeking behavior

e: jody.dalmacion@gmail.com