

**www.maternityconsumernetwork.org.au**

*“Better outcomes for mothers and babies means better outcomes for the whole community”*

**Introduction**

Maternity Consumer Network is a consumer based organisation, with members across Australia. Our goal is for Australian families to have access to high quality maternity care, in a framework of informed choice. We particularly promote access to public available data on maternity care providers, community-based continuity of midwifery care as a primary care strategy, and also bundled maternity payments, ideally where the woman is responsible for where her bundled payment goes, whether hospital, private obstetric or midwifery care, or GP.

We believe a major contribution of the quality and costs in the maternity sector is driven by the current payment system that rewards intervention, and encourages volume-centric care over value-driven care, with little transparency in outcomes.

In the current maternity care climate, it is important the focus moves to improving, and capturing data on a range of outcomes for mothers and babies, particularly around mother’s experience of birth and emotional and mental well-being. Currently, almost one third are experiencing postnatal depression and over 14% experiencing PTSD, resulted from birth (Boorman, Devilly, Gamble, Creedy, & Fenwich, 2014).

We believe the benefits to consumers will only truly be seen if treatment and outcomes by clinicians, across public and private settings are mandated to be publicly available, as recommended and practiced in other parts of the world. According to Miller (2008) ‘Health care providers should be required to report publicly on the level and quality of services provided to patients, particularly to minority and disadvantaged populations’.

**Feedback:**

Current reporting for maternity and neonatal are: induction of labour, instrumental delivery, 3rd and 4th degree tears, episiotomy, caesarean section and APGAR scores of less than 7. This reporting is difficult for consumers to access, understand and doesn’t provide consumers adequate information necessary to make informed choices in their maternity care provider through comparisons of outcomes by care providers.

We support the intent of Queensland Health, acknowledging that the safest healthcare service providers are characterised by transparent sharing of appropriate information and the creation and promotion of culture devoted to safety. We acknowledge the high intervention rates in the maternity setting, and the need to improve maternity care outcomes, and allow transparency in the variables we currently see in an activity incentivised funding scheme, such as caesarean rate in the public setting is 34%, and private setting almost 40%.

We recently won the “Healthy Queensland” award sponsored by Queensland Health at the state GovHack awards, with an app concept in relation to public available maternity data. The app concept enabled consumers to compare facilities, access information with easily understood infographics, and enabled them to also provide feedback on facilities and services, which isn’t currently available, such as VBAC (vaginal birth after caesarean), water birth, informed consent and making it comparable to national averages. We are keen to make this concept a reality, to ensure consumers are kept up to date with information about what is occurring with other families in their maternity care. We acknowledge the low rates of health literacy, so believe it is imperative to ensure an understanding via visual representation of data.

Not only is it important for consumers to access public data, the transparency also is an opportunity to highlight disparities and improve facilities outcomes. The Australian Atlas of Healthcare Variation: Cesearean Section for selected women giving birth for the first time demonstrated these huge variances, without adequate causation. We know, whilst factors such as weight, diabetes, and age are contributing factors to the risk of caesarean, the biggest risk factor is the place a woman gives birth (Shah, 2016).

With almost 60% of Australian adults identified as having low health literacy, this has a significant impact on their understanding of data, but also a high use of services, poorer health outcomes and a high likelihood of adverse outcomes (ABS, 2008). We strongly believe the consumer voice and consumer consultation needs to be central in the decision of how to present this data, to ensure those with low health literacy can easily understand what the data implies. Ensuring consumers are involved in any working groups, rather than just in consultation phase is an imperative part of the process. Visuals, infographics and even videos will aid in consumer understanding.

In recent years, QCMB found only about half of all women (52.4 percent) birthing in public and private facilities reported making an informed decision to have a planned caesarean before labour, and only one-fifth (19.9 percent) of women made an informed decision to have a caesarean section when the procedure was unplanned. Data such as this demonstrates the need to widen the current reporting parameters to include informed consent. This could be included in the patient (consumer) satisfaction survey and need to include informed consent for procedures such as vaginal exams, assisted births, episiotomies, pain relief, as well as cesareans.

Public data will also aid in the referral to and from facilities/clinicians, which suggests clinician and facility data need to be accessible. In 2008, a systematic review by Fung et al. revealed that hospitals’ public reporting is associated with a stimulation of quality improvement activities.

**Conclusion:**

We support transparency in our maternity care system with public accessible data. This data needs to be consumer-friendly, easily accessible and mandated across the public and private sector, released quarterly and regularly updated. Ensuring the data captured is also relevant to a woman’s experience and emotional wellbeing will also ensure improved outcomes, performance of clinicians and facilities and enable consumers to make more informed choices in their care.

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