The Implications of Undermining and Breaching Trust in Maternity Care; Findings from the WRISK Project

Aim To learn about physicians’ perceptions of trust in their patients and understand how these perceptions impact their patient-physician communication.

Methods A qualitative study using an Immersion/Crystallization thematic analysis of 23 semi-structured interviews with physicians, specializing in Diabetes. Analysis included both horizontal (focusing on each interview separately) and vertical (comparing different interviews) analysis to learn how different physicians perceive their relationship with Diabetes patients and the communication skills they use.

Results Physicians discussed the complexity in Diabetes care, including the need to rely on their patients to manage their disease and adhere to the challenging treatment plan. They mentioned their feeling of limited control over this adherence.

Some have come to terms with this limited ‘control’ and accepted their reliance on the patient. These physicians invested in building a relationship and mutual trust with the patient, accepting his involvement as a key partner in treatment decision-making.

Others, found relying on the patient challenging. They were concerned with their responsibility and felt frustrated and intimidated by the limited control. They invested in preserving and enhancing control over the decision-making, including using tactics and persuasion or intimidation, to increase adherence.

Conclusions Physicians’ trust in their patients, and their perceptions and acceptance of the limited control, play a significant role in the way they communicate and share decisions.

Providing them tools to reflect and deal with their perceptions, accepting the limited control, and enhancing their trust in their patients, can help them cope with these challenges and communicate in a more patient-centered manner.

Results Over 7,000 women completed the survey and 34 women then participated in interviews. 29% of the interview population were BAME and 29% received means-tested benefits. Many women initially implicitly trusted their healthcare providers (HCPs). However, partial advice from HCPs, particularly around medication, was a source of anxiety for women.

Participants reported that the use of screening to ‘catch them out’ about smoking undermined their relationships with midwives. Several women living with obesity reported their data being shared with third parties, further undermining trust.

Some reported lying to their midwives about their behaviours because they felt judged.

Conclusions Our findings show the importance of risk communication that respects women’s autonomy and trusts them to make decisions about their own pregnancy. When trust breaks down some women may be more likely to hide their behaviour. Our research highlights a need to improve risk communication within maternity care.

Shared decision making represents a shift from a paternalistic, ‘doctor knows best’ approach to a collaborative approach that values and centres patients’ knowledge of their own best interests. Resources such as training for clinicians, awareness raising for patients and the public, and decision support tools are used to achieve shared decision making. Despite these efforts, patients can feel that they have little choice about treatment, and some patients say they prefer to trust in their clinicians’ recommendations.

Our research highlights the need to improve risk communication within maternity care.

Background Women receive many public health messages relating to pregnancy which are intended to improve outcomes for babies and mothers. However, negotiating risk and the maternity system can feel confusing and dis-empowering. Relationships between women and their carers are central to maternity care trajectories but can be adversely affected by issues of trust and autonomy.

Aim/Objectives To explore issues in the communication of pregnancy-related risk; to articulate women’s experiences and develop co-produced recommendations to improve pregnancy-related risk communication.

Methods We used an online survey and qualitative interviews to gain an understanding of women’s experiences of advice, support, and decision making in pregnancy. The survey was disseminated through a Facebook advertisement inviting women 16–45 years across the UK to participate. Data was collected between June-August 2019. Survey participants were sampled to ensure the interview population included women whose voices are seldom heard and disproportionately impacted by poor risk communication. Data was collected between April-November 2019.

Conclusions Our findings show the importance of risk communication that respects women’s autonomy and trusts them to make decisions about their own pregnancy. When trust breaks down some women may be more likely to hide their behaviour. Our research highlights a need to improve risk communication within maternity care.