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Results from a global survey on midwives perception of women using the Internet for pregnancy related information

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Background

Pregnant women are turning to the Internet for a wide range of health related information during pregnancy. The implications of this practice for midwives have not been fully explored.

Aim

To report quantitative and qualitative data from a cross-sectional exploratory, descriptive survey on midwives perception of pregnant women using the Internet as a source for pregnancy related information.

Methodology

A global sample of 303 midwives accessed and completed a web-based questionnaire. Data was downloaded into SPSS for analysis. NVivo software was utilised to code and identify themes or patterns emerging from the supplementary qualitative data provided. The study received ethical approval from the Office for Research Ethics Committee, Northern Ireland.

Results

Eight-nine per cent (n=271) were aware of an increase in Internet use among pregnant women. Midwives reported women use the Internet for information on a broad range of pregnancy related topics. Eighty-six percent (n=260) had experience of pregnant woman discussing information from the Internet with them in the last year. Of these only 3% (n=8) viewed the information as 'not relevant' and 19% (n=49) regarded the information to be either 'not very' or 'not at all' accurate. Sixty-seven per cent (n=174) considered the information had an effect on how the woman thought her pregnancy should be managed. A description of case studies depicts how the Internet has an impact on the changing power relation between pregnant woman and health professionals.

Conclusion

Midwives recognise that women use the Internet as an information source and outcomes from this research demonstrate a change in women's decision-making. Midwives' skills in Internet use need to be developed so that they can be effective and competent partners in supporting post-modern women. Formal 'Internet training' needs to be included within the midwifery curriculum.