

Does CenteringPregnancy promote maternal health literacy?

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In May I discovered sweet potato cake; it must be the reason God made sweet potatoes... I was in Greenville, SC to visit Greenville Health Systems' CenteringPregnancy program at the start of the CenteringPregnancy Health Literacy Trial.

CenteringPregnancy, a model of group prenatal care, is an evidence-based innovation that has been nationally recognized for improved outcomes including preterm birth rates, low birth weight rates, small for gestational age, breastfeeding rates, and immunization rates. The Health Literacy Trial aims to assess the capacity of CenteringPregnancy to promote maternal health literacy and empowerment. A secondary aim to is validate the Maternal Health Literacy Self Assessment designed for the project.

Demonstrated higher breastfeeding and immunization rates suggest that the Centering model promotes mothers' health literacy and health empowerment by supporting knowledge gain and changes in health behaviors and healthcare utilization practices. My previous studies have shown that social support from home visitors is a catalyst for improved health literacy. In those studies, visitors were trained to "Teach by Asking", that is to ask reflective questions instead of delivering health education. In Centering, rather than teaching and informing, facilitators ask questions to elicit the group wisdom. The group provides social support.

Is it the information?

The Centering model is "content averse", says its founder Sharon Rising. Printed information is intentionally very limited; it focuses on key health behavior topics that research has linked directly to outcomes— the same set of messages that are the basis of *Beginnings Pregnancy Guide*. Participants are encouraged to reflect on topics together and separately, and facilitators make sure essential topics are raised and misinformation is corrected. For example, most of us in the group I participated with were stumped by the facilitator's question, "Is corn a vegetable?". The shared surprise of learning in the ensuing discussion that it's a

grain loaded with sugar was, no doubt, more memorable and instructive than reading government recommendations to eat your vegetables.

Still studies suggest that pregnant women are voraciously information hungry. We wondered if women learn as much as they want and need to know from their group. Or would more information further increase their health literacy; in other words, are women who receive more information more likely to act on key health behavior messages?

By luck of the draw, about 120 pregnant women participating in CenteringPregnancy at this Greenville clinic will comprise the comparison group in the trial; other than completing the Maternal Health Literacy Self-Assessment early and late in pregnancy, they will receive “usual care” in the Centering model. Self-assessment must be considered an intervention in itself as it raises awareness of the key messages and the link between mothers’ prenatal behaviors and newborn health.

An equal number of participants at a second site will incorporate *Beginnings Pregnancy Guide* into the program along with the Self-Assessments. We will see if providing additional information promotes health literacy more than “usual care”.

Read the project overview. Learn more about CenteringPregnancy

Free Health Literacy Training Videos:

Promoting Health Literacy with Free Information & Cool Tools from your National Library of Medicine is a series of 3 brief (8-10 min) videos that show viewers how to introduce families to free national health and medical information resources such as MedlinePlus; introduce the concept of health literacy as a personal asset that can be developed, and demonstrate a practical process for empowering individuals to use information for health-related problem solving and action planning. There is a facilitator’s guide, pre-and post-tests and handouts. See <http://www.healthliteracypromotion.com/Free-Training.html>