How Should Obstetric Fistula Treatment Be Delivered? An Evaluation Of Fistula Centres

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BACKGROUND:

• Obstetric fistula is a neglected disease of women and girls, who can suffer social isolation and rejection from husbands as a result of this preventable and treatable condition1
• Obstetric fistula is an abnormal opening between the vagina and the rectum or bladder, leading to incontinence and infection2
• Obstetric fistulas typically occur as a complication of prolonged obstructed labour, usually in low- and middle-income countries where emergency obstetric care is lacking3
• 1-2 million women worldwide suffer from obstetric fistula, with 50,000-100,000 new cases each year2
• Various barriers to care mean that only 1 in 50 receive the necessary surgical treatment3
• Where and how to best provide treatment has been debated

AIMS:

1. Identify the main approaches to providing surgical treatment for obstetric fistula
2. Evaluate fistula centres, identifying key themes from the literature

METHODS:

• Publications retrieved from PubMed and SCOPUS
• Search terms: (obstetric fistula) AND (hospital OR centre OR center)
• Inclusion criteria: English language; Population – all women with obstetric fistula; Topic - focus on provision of obstetric fistula care
• Exclusion criteria: Topic - Focus on co-morbidities, provision of emergency obstetric care, prevention of obstetric fistula
• Aim 1: information on centre providing treatment retrieved
• Aim 2: limitations and advantages of approaches retrieved, and analysed by theme

RESULTS:

AIM 1: 4 main approaches to providing obstetric fistula treatment:

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<td>Short term provision, commonly by NGOs</td>
<td>Notably, Mercy Ships1 Typically docked in one location for a period of months</td>
<td>Integrated hospital-based fistula care services</td>
<td>Centres exclusively for treating women with obstetric fistula</td>
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Table 1. Description of the types of obstetric fistula treatment centres

AIM 2: Thematic analysis of obstetric fistula centres:

• FUNDING
  • Camps and ships simpler to fund than long-term centres
  • External, long-term funding often necessary for appropriate facilities and staff in district hospitals4
  • Success of specialist centres, ships and camps improved by funding of patient transport costs5,6

• QUALITY OF CARE
  • Specialist staff trained to treat complex cases4
  • Treatment from ships or camps - limited given short-term10
  • District hospitals equipped mainly for simple fistula cases only11

• ACCESS TO TREATMENT
  • Travel costs greater with camps/ships or specialist centres9 Camps/ships rely on radio or TV advertisements to reach women9
  • Greater access to district hospitals than specialist centres9

• TRAINING AND SUSTAINABILITY
  • Specialist centres provide opportunities for training local people to provide fistula care12
  • Long-term impact of ships and camps limited12

CONCLUSIONS

• 4 main types of fistula centre identified from the literature
• Limitations and advantages of each of these types can be summarised into the following themes:
  • Funding
  • Re-integration into society
  • Quality of care
  • Access to treatment
  • Training and sustainability
• Although there is variety in provision of care within each category of fistula centre, a broad summary of thematic analysis of each approach is shown below:

FISTULA CAMPS:

SURGERY SHIPS:

DISTRICT HOSPITALS:

SPECIALISED FISTULA TREATMENT CENTRES:

Implications:

• There is a striking paucity of literature evaluating approaches to tackle this devastating but neglected disease
• Camps and surgical ships are less likely to improve access to treatment in the long-term
• Improving treatment provision by specialist centres and district hospitals, will require increased funding for travel costs and staff/facilities, respectively

REFERENCES


Fig.1 Study Selection
Fig.2 Thematic evaluation of issues in providing fistula treatment

Method: Aims

1. Original Search: 1027
2. De-Duplication: 287 citations excluded
3. 740 articles and abstracts assessed for eligibility
4. 729 citations excluded
5. 11 articles included