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Preconception health education and the impact on maternal and newborn health

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Maternal and newborn mortality is steadily increasing in the United States but may be preventable with comprehensive reproductive health education prior to conception. Preconception health education begins in childhood, teaching health promotion across the life span, including proper diet, exercise, and folic acid supplementation. Health care providers should provide preconception health education during routine office visits, however, it is often not addressed. Among pregnant women, preconception health education decreases the incidence of hypertension and gestational diabetes. In neonates, preconception health education decreases the risk of neural tube defects. Gaps exist in curricula regarding recommendations by governing agencies and when to address preconception health education. In order to educate health care providers about preconception health education, a study was undertaken teaching 71 health science and education students at one university in Oregon and three universities in California. Faculty and student knowledge deficits were addressed and faculty advisors were trained to help students educate peers and members of the community. IRB approval was obtained, each student gave informed consent prior to the study, and all data were collected anonymously. Pretest-posttest data were collected using a 12-item instrument and analyzed using t-tests. Analyses of pretest and posttest data yielded a significant increase in knowledge among participants about preconception health education. Findings suggest that by introducing curricula regarding preconception health education among students, health care providers may be more likely to provide preconception health education during routine office visits. This education may improve health outcomes for pregnant women and neonates.