

Neonatal care delivery for low birth weight infants in the context of continuum of care in Ghana

Christina Schuler^{1, 2}, Dr. Faith Agbozo², George Edward Ntow³, Dr. Veronika Waldboth¹

¹Zurich University of Applied Sciences ZHAW, Institute of Nursing, ²University of Health and Allied Sciences UHAS, School of Public Health, Department of Family and Community Health, Ho, Ghana, ³Dodowa Health Research Centre, Dodowa, Ghana

3rd Annual Meeting, Swiss Society of Early Childhood Research, November 23rd - November 24th, 2021

Introduction

Effective linkages in the continuum of care for newborns at hospital, community and home care levels have a high tendency of minimising adverse events associated with low birth weight (LBW) (UNICEF-WHO, 2019). In Ghana, however, linkages across health settings and family support structures are not clearly laid-out (Okawa et al., 2019). There is scarcity of literature on views of health professionals and families of LBW infants on the care continuum in this country (Engmann et al., 2016). Therefore, this study aimed at eliciting the continuum of care (CoC) for LBW infants in Ghana and studying how these linkages can be strengthened to optimise quality of care.

Methods

This study adopted a constructivist grounded theory design (Charmaz, 2014). Data collection took place in a municipality in Ghana between 2020 - 2021 with families, health professionals and managers providing care in clinical and community-based facilities. Audio recorded in-depth interviews were analysed using initial and focused coding, constant comparative analysis, theoretical memos, and diagramming until theoretical sufficiency was determined. Ethical clearance was gained from the Ghana Health Service Ethical Review Committee.

Findings

The analysis of 25 interviews generated an interpretive theory (Figure 1) with ten themes illuminating the organisation of the care continuum and the experiences and needs of family members and health professionals along the CoC for LWB newborns in Ghana.

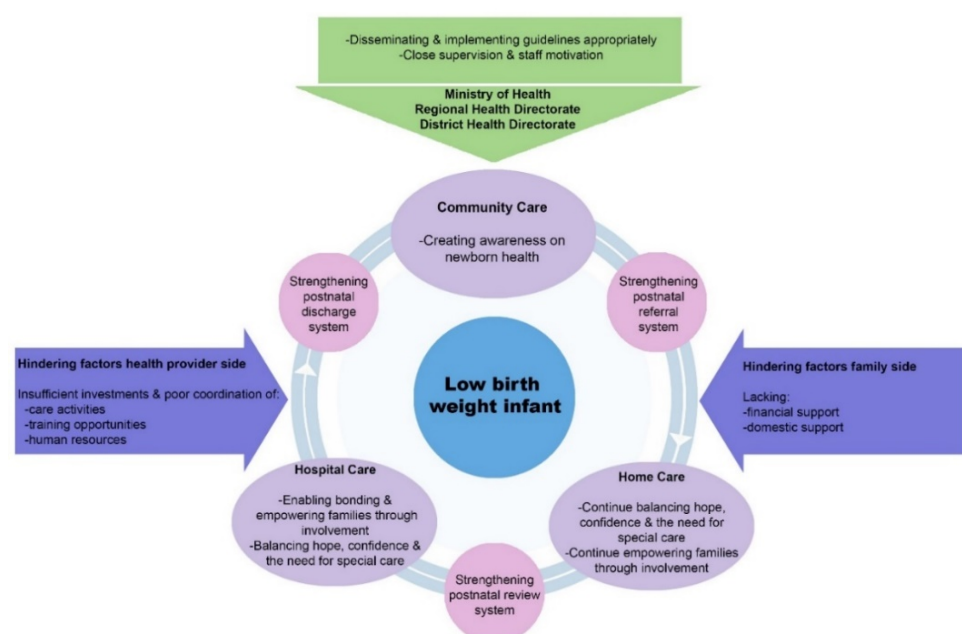


Figure 1: Continuum of Care for low birth weight infants in Ghana

The findings revealed that the (1) referral, (2) discharge, and (3) review processes were not systematically planned and documented. Neonatal care knowledge among health professionals was lacking due to (4) insufficient investments in coordination and trainings with (5) awareness creation on newborn health thought to reduce misconceptions. (6) Motivated staff and close supervision and (7) implementation of care guidelines were identified as enabling factors. (8) Mothers lacked financial and domestic support and (9) needed assistance in balancing their hope and confidence to provide special care for their LBW infants. (10) Early bonding and family involvement were helpful to overcome these challenges.

Discussion and Conclusion

A coordinated care process and an improved communication strategy is necessary to achieve an effective care continuum for LBW infants and their families. More and coordinated investments into planning and training opportunities are required to increase the number of specialised neonatal health personnel. Effective implementation of existing guidelines, involving stakeholders, and promoting committed leadership can improve quality in the care continuum. Implementation of culturally adapted family system care increases family involvement enabling them to provide appropriate care. Implementation research could inform health care professionals and policy makers how best guidelines and a family system care approach could be applied effectively at all levels of care to achieve well-coordinated and quality care along the CoC for LBW infants.

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Contact

Christina Schuler, MScN, MAS International Health, RN
Email: christina.schuler@zhaw.ch