

# Perinatal Communication\*

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## Article Info

## Abstract

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### Keywords:

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*In the perinatal period, communication is often established between the health professional and the woman. Effective communication between the health professional and the woman during pregnancy, birth and postpartum processes is very important in protecting maternal and fetal health. In this direction, it is aimed to examine the importance of communication in the perinatal period with the planned review. For the study planned as a compilation, "communication", "perinatal", "pregnancy", "birth", "postpartum period" and related words were searched in electronic databases (Google Scholar, PubMed, Science Direct, Web of Science, Cochrane and Mendeley) between 01 March 2022 and 31 March 2022. The perinatal period begins at the 22nd week of pregnancy and ends at the end of the 7th postpartum day. In this process, care and consultancy services are provided in line with the principles of care that respect women and evidence-based practices. Consequently, effective communication is the most important component of evidence-based practice and respectful care in labor and delivery. In addition, effective communication between the health professional and the woman during the perinatal period will increase the quality of her care.*

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## Introduction

Communication has a very important place in people's development processes (Yılmaz Esencan et al., 2019). Communication is the process of interpersonal transmission of information, feelings and thoughts. People always need communication. Today, communication has a special importance in ensuring the sustainability of interpersonal interaction in many sectors, especially in the education, health and service sectors. In particular, health is one of the sectors where the active use of communication is mandatory (Aybaş, 2021).

The health sector and communication started to be talked about in the 90s, but its development has accelerated in recent years. The main reason for this is the developments in technology. In addition to technological developments, the increasing prevalence of evidence-based practices in health care has shown that an effective communication should be established between the health professional and the patient (Aybaş, 2021). In short, these developments have necessitated the development of the communication network between the health worker and the patient. One of the causes of malpractice is

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the inability to establish effective communication between healthcare professionals and patients. (Şengün, 2016; Aybaş, 2021).

The harm that occurs as a result of the faulty behavior of health professionals while performing their profession is defined as malpractice, and the failure to perform patient care correctly as a result of behaving carelessly and negligently is defined as malpractice (Demir Zencirci, 2010). It is known that malpractice and erroneous medical interventioning health care services are caused by the inability to establish effective communication between health professionals and patients (Metin, 2018).

Today, the number of lawsuits filed due to malpractice or erroneous medical intervention is increasing. These cases often involve malpractice or erroneous medical interventions occurring during pregnancy follow-up and birth, which are the basis of midwifery care. Many reasons such as lack of professional skills, negligent or careless behavior of midwives can cause malpractice or erroneous medical intervention. The inability to establish correct and effective communication between the healthcare professional and the patient is also one of the reasons for erroneous intervention (Türkmen & Ekti Genç, 2017; Metin, 2018). For this reason, effective communication between the health professional and the woman during pregnancy, birth and postpartum processes is very important in the protection and development of maternal and fetal health (Demir and Hotun Şahin, 2014). In this direction, it is aimed to examine the importance of communication in the perinatal period with the planned review.

## **Material and Method**

For the study planned as a compilation, "communication", "perinatal", "pregnancy", "birth", "postpartum period" and related words were searched in electronic databases (Google Scholar, PubMed, Science Direct, Web of Science, Cochrane and Mendeley) between 01 March 2022 and 31 March 2022.

## **Communication and Perinatal Communication**

Communication constitutes one of the eight areas of the quality of perinatal care within the framework recommended by the World Health Organization (Tunçalp et al., 2017). In addition, communication is a factor that is vital in the perinatal period and significantly affects the satisfaction of women in perinatal care (Attarha et al., 2016). For this reason, it is estimated that effective communication between the woman and the health professional during the perinatal period can help women have a positive birth experience (Nunes et al., 2014). Studies in the literature show that effective communication with women in the perinatal period helps to reduce women's anxiety and fears (Downe et al., 2018; Baranowska et al., 2021). In the literature, it is also argued that health professionals who provide care and counseling services to women in the perinatal period should develop their effective communication skills and base their care on respectful care (Vogel et al., 2016; Shakibazadeh et al., 2018).

Communication is at the foundation of midwifery care (Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2015). In addition, it is known that the effective communication of midwives with women affects women's satisfaction during pregnancy, childbirth or motherhood and their adaptation to these processes. For this reason, the importance of communication in midwifery services and especially in the perinatal period should be determined clearly (Ahmed, 2020).

Communication is the interpersonal transmission of information, feelings and thoughts by any means imaginable, especially by mass media such as telephone, telegraph, television and radio. Communication is derived from the word "communication". The history of communication goes back to the existence of humanity. As a matter of fact, it is known that people living under the limiting pressure of nature in the Paleolithic Age, known as the Old Stone Age, which started about 2 million years ago, needed to interact with other people and provided interpersonal communication by shaping carved stones (Yalçınkaya, 2000). The need for communication has gradually increased in every period of history, and as a result of this need, communication has developed rapidly and finally reached the

peak and contributed to the development of civilization (Aybaş, 2021). Today, the role of communication in the field of health, where scientific developments occur very rapidly, has begun to be discussed (Işık, 2019). Especially the concept of health communication has attracted a lot of attention in recent years and many studies have been done in this field (Şengün, 2016; Işık, 2019; Aybaş, 2021). The importance of communication and communication in the perinatal period, which affects the health of women in particular and the whole society in general, is one of the topics that have recently attracted attention and started to be talked about.

The perinatal period starts at the 22nd week of pregnancy and ends at the end of the 7th day after the birth. This period is very important for fetal and maternal health (WHO, 2020). It is a known fact that effective communication, which is an educational strategy and aims to affect the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of the target audience, is necessary in the perinatal period, which is considered important for maternal and fetal health (Şengün, 2016).

Communication in the perinatal period is often established between the health professional and the woman. The aim here is to inform the woman and include her in her own care, to empathize, to inform her relatives about the health of the mother and baby, and most importantly, to facilitate the woman's trust in the health professional (Öztürk, 2009; Şengün, 2016). As a matter of fact, it is known that the communication established between the woman and the health professional during the perinatal period has a great role in the trust of the people who care for the woman and her participation in her own care. However, studies show that health professionals have difficulties in communicating and they often cannot communicate effectively (Wise, 2001; Kihitir, 2011). All healthcare professionals who encounter women at all stages of the perinatal period (pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum period), which is a special process, should have a more developed ability to initiate and maintain communication effectively than other healthcare professionals.

## **Communications in Pregnancy**

More than 200 million pregnancies occur every year in the world. More than 40% of these pregnancies are unwanted pregnancies. Unwanted pregnancies are an important factor that affects maternal and fetal health. Therefore, it is very important for healthcare professionals to inform fertile couples about family planning methods (Annadurai et al., 2017; ACOG, 2019).

In our society, the fact that only married individuals receive information about family planning methods from health institutions and demand services causes extramarital pregnancies to occur frequently (Civil and Yıldız, 2010; Haskan Avcı, 2014). It should be noted that every couple has the right to plan pregnancy and decide when they are ready for pregnancy. 40% of pregnancies in marriages occurring in unwanted or extramarital affairs can be carried out without complications with qualified and high-quality prenatal care and consultancy services. Antenatal care services have an important place in this sense (Fowler et al., 2021).

Antenatal care is the follow-up, protection and improvement of maternal and fetal health, as well as regular follow-ups throughout pregnancy in order to detect risks at an early stage (Sönmez 2007). These follow-ups aim to continue the pregnancy process in a healthy way and to give birth to healthy babies, and a healthy communication with the couples during the follow-ups is very important (Ocakoğlu et al., 2008).

Prenatal care is provided by midwives, family physicians and gynecologists. Health professionals who provide prenatal care, which requires a multidisciplinary team understanding, should be able to use communication effectively and identify the risks that may occur in the early period by informing the couples about pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum period with a collaborative approach (Rule and Beckmann, 2019; Fowler et al., 2021). Therefore, it can be said that the antenatal care services, in which a healthy communication plays a key role, are sufficient in terms of quality and quantity, and that it

continues at regular intervals from the first trimester of pregnancy until birth is very important in maintaining a healthy perinatal period for mother and baby (Dibek et al., 2006).

### **Communication at Birth**

Birth is a unique experience for a woman. The attitude of health professionals and the communication techniques they use are very important in this unique experience. The fact that the woman focuses on the health status of herself and her baby in labor also makes it necessary for health professionals to approach women with effective communication techniques (Kurz et al., 2019). International guides such as World Health Organization (WHO) and National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) also state that providing care and counseling services to women by using effective communication techniques by health professionals in labor will help women to relax during labor, experience less pain and experience birth in a positive way. In this way, it will be ensured that women's birth satisfaction increases. In addition, international guidelines state that effective communication in labor is at the center of practices aimed at improving women's birth outcomes (WHO, 2016; NICE, 2017).

The importance of effective communication in health care has been known for a long time. Today, evidence-based practices have necessitated a review of the role of communication in decision making and an examination of how patient experiences can affect clinical safety and effectiveness of outcomes (Ames et al., 2017). In addition, this evidence-based approach also aims to provide respectful care to women throughout the action. Communication is of great importance in providing respectful care (Vogel et al., 2016). In this sense, it is very important for health professionals to base the care they offer women on respectful care and to be able to communicate effectively with women throughout the demonstration. Today, it is known that in some countries, health professionals are periodically subjected to various trainings in order to know and actively use effective communication techniques (Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2015). In this direction, it can be said that with in-service trainings, health professionals should be informed about respectful care throughout the action and communication techniques that form the basis of respectful care.

Midwives is the primary responsible of normal vaginal delivery. For this reason, continuous care under the leadership of the midwife has an important role in establishing effective communication with a woman in labor (Homer et al., 2014). It is very important that midwives, who are the health professionals who come into contact with women the first and most, can use communication techniques effectively. However, studies show that all healthcare professionals have difficulties in communicating (Care Quality Commission, 2013; Alderdice et al., 2016). Failure to communicate effectively with the woman, especially during labor, will cause the mother to become more stressed, prolong the labor and even stop it. In this case, it is inevitable that maternal and fetal health will be affected negatively (Mannava et al. 2015; Ayers et al., 2016).

### **Communication in the Postpartum Period**

The postpartum period is a process that begins with the birth of the baby and usually lasts for six to eight weeks, and the mother's body returns to the pre-pregnancy period. In this process, women experience many physiological and psychological changes (Kalra et al., 2017). The postpartum period is very important for the health of the mother and her baby. However, in this period, the woman who takes care of the baby as well as her own care is usually left alone (Milani et al., 2017).

In the postpartum period, professional support is very important as well as social support. For this reason, health professionals should support the mother by providing care and counseling services in the postpartum period and make it easier for them to cope with the problems they encounter. In addition, it should not be forgotten that the majority of maternal deaths occur in the postpartum period. Therefore, it is very valuable to be by the side of the woman with an effective communication in this process (Haran et al., 2014).

Postpartum care is very important to protect and improve the health of mother and baby. The main purpose of postpartum care is to meet the health and social needs of the family (Saluja and Bryant, 2021). With effective postpartum care, it is aimed that both the mother and her baby receive individualized care. Effective communication is the focus of individualized care (Tharpe et al., 2021).

Postpartum care is provided with evidence-based practices based on the integration of patient preferences and evidence from scientific research (Saluja and Bryant, 2021). When the national and international guidelines on postpartum care are examined, it is seen that there is a consensus that the self-care of the mother and her baby should be planned and carried out with evidence-based practices. In these guidelines, there is the view that postpartum care requires a multidisciplinary approach and that effective communication should be established between health professionals and family members (Postnatal Care and Management Guidelines, 2018; NICE, 2013; Postnatal Care Program Guidelines for Victorian Health Services, 2012). Health professionals have many responsibilities in postpartum care services. Health professionals should approach women and their families with effective communication techniques, identify the issues they need and ensure that they receive appropriate care. In addition, early detection of risks such as infection, postpartum atony bleeding and breastfeeding problems is among the duties of health professionals (Postpartum Care and Management Guide, 2018).

## Conclusion

As a result, effective communication between the health professional and the woman in the perinatal period will increase the quality of her care. Effective communication is the most important component of evidence-based practice and respectful care at birth. For this reason, all healthcare professionals serving in the perinatal period should have effective communication skills. However, it is not always easy to communicate with a woman who is worried about her own health and the health of her baby during pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum processes. The health professional, who knows effective communication techniques during these periods, should approach the woman in the right way and make the woman feel that she is not alone throughout the action, and thus increase the satisfaction of pregnancy and birth. In the postpartum period, it should facilitate the adaptation to the motherhood role and initiate mother-infant or father-infant attachment in the early period. However, studies in the literature show that health professionals have weak effective communication skills. For this reason, it is necessary to include perinatal communication in both the curriculum and in-service training in the undergraduate period, and the awareness of the students who are the hope of the future and the health professionals who are actively involved in the field should be increased.

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