17th World Congress in Fetal Medicine

Survey of Women's understanding of the first trimester screening test

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Objective

The aim of this study was to assess the level of understanding of pregnant women that receive routine antenatal care at Southend Hospital regarding the purpose of the first trimester screening test. The lack of information and limited knowledge of the pregnant women regarding the options of screening in the first trimester and the method used for risk calculation constitutes the reason of the present study.

Methods

We performed a cross-sectional questionnaire study of 300 patients over a 4-month period of time assessing the knowledge they had retained after their nuchal scan.

Results

More than 90% of women had an appointment with the midwife prior to the scan and they had already received the information booklet regarding the screening test of the 1st trimester. 88% of them had a discussion about the screening test with the midwife while 72 % read the information booklet. The vast majority of women (more than 90%) accepted to have the screening test knowing that it was optional. However, 1/3 of the women answered that did not understand the possible options of the screening test (screening for T21 or T13 and T18 or all 3). This is also reflected by the high percentage of women (56%) that declined or did not answer the question regarding the purpose of screening for T21, T18 and T13. 56. Additionally, a significant proportion of women (27%) were not aware of a priori/background risk for chromosomal abnormalities. Furthermore, in case of a high risk result, 61% of women replied that they had not taken into account an invasive testing. Moreover, 39% of women that elected to have a diagnostic test reveal the lack of information regarding possible complications of an invasive procedure.

Conclusion

Even though, the vast majority of patients consent to have the combined first trimester screening test, a significant proportion have not understood the screening options, the existence of a priori risk for chromosomal abnormalities and the further testing options in high risk group patients. Therefore, in order to improve the comprehension of the first trimester screening test for chromosomal abnormalities, we recommend to enclose an information leaflet with the nuchal appointment letter, as well as to demonstrate, in detail, the objectives and the aspects of the test during the examination.