Pharmacists: A missed opportunity for providing family planning services in Egypt

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BACKGROUND

The recent increase in Egypt’s fertility rate, highlights the need for expanding the role of pharmacists in the provision of family planning (FP) services owing to their wide geographical spread and that many people resort to pharmacists for free health consultations. However, there is evidence that pharmacists provide incomplete and incorrect FP information that may lead to discontinuation or incorrect use of methods. Many pharmacists have little to no knowledge of some FP methods such as condoms and emergency contraceptives. Hence, adequate training of pharmacists is crucial to scale up their role in providing FP guidance and referring clients in need to trained physicians.

METHODS

This model is being implemented in two governorates in Egypt: Port Said and Souhag. A comprehensive FP manual encompassing both theoretical and practical components was developed. The manual also included communication skills and how to deliver information about FP methods to clients. Job aids were also developed to be used by the trained pharmacists. A one-day training focusing on FP methods was delivered by expert trainers using developed manuals and job aids. Follow-up visits are conducted monthly as well as meetings to discuss challenges and lessons learned.

FINDINGS

Follow up meetings with the 351 trained pharmacists revealed technical competence in dispelling misconceptions and responding to common FP questions, such as methods for breastfeeding women or what to do when a pill is missed.

Some trained pharmacists expressed their willingness to advocate for FP among their peers and communities. Most pharmacists also refer clients in need to trained physicians.

Several pharmacists have reported that women are increasingly bringing their relatives and friends to their pharmacies for FP consultations especially in areas where there are no physicians.

CONCLUSION

Targeting pharmacists offers invaluable opportunity to raise FP awareness in their communities being the ones the public usually refer to when seeking questions regarding health. Pharmacists could play a key role in combating problems of unmet need and discontinuation and advancing Egypt’s FP program when adequately trained, monitored and linked with trained providers of FP services.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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