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Telemedicine – a possibility for women who are discharged early after childbirth?

Aim: The aim is to identify the needs of new parents and their infants for nursing support during the first seven days postnatal, based on parents' experiences with early postnatal discharge, thereby gaining new knowledge that would assist in assessing whether telemedicine is a viable option to ensure the required support and guidance.

The aim is also to involve the users in the development of technology and new ways of enhancing the relation between healthcare personnel and the families.

The possibility for moving the postnatal period virtually from the postnatal ward to the homes of the families will be tried out and evaluated to investigate if telemedicine can provide an alternative in the postnatal period so that the new parents feel secure, are well being and empowered.

Background: The duration of the postnatal stay at the hospital after delivery has declined in the last 10-20 years. At the same time the number of readmissions of newborn babies with problems related to nutrition has increased. Concurrently the literature shows that new parents are experiencing a feeling of insecurity in the postnatal period.

The region of Southern Denmark made a new policy in 2011 for the postnatal period.

The early postnatal discharge is prospectively the general procedure after uncomplicated delivery, also for first-time mothers, who previously have had the possibility of staying at the postnatal ward after the delivery. It is the intention all new parents are discharged 4-6 hours after delivery, which increases the need for a further development of postnatal follow up.

Design: This study utilizes a participatory design process derived from Action Research and framed in critical theory. The postnatal telemedicine follow up is developed together with the users/participants. This study consists of three phases.

First phase: Identification of problems. The aim was to identify the needs of new parents during the first seven days postnatal. All stakeholders were involved in investigating the needs and problems discovered. The new knowledge was used to investigate if telemedicine is a viable option in providing the required support.

Second phase: The development process. The aim was to discuss the needs and the proposed solutions and from here develop and test the IT solution – in this case a tailored app.

Third phase: Evaluation of the IT solution, where new parents, who are discharged early, get an iPad with the app on, when they are discharged early. They have it with them for seven days.

Data will be collected from fieldwork, qualitative interviews, focus group interviews and workshops with the new parents and health care professionals.

Results: The achieved knowledge is expected to contribute to a further development of the postnatal follow up, which can form the basis whether it can be implemented as a permanent follow up in the postnatal period.

The use of action research is expected to illuminate a process of change in the healthcare system with the involvement of users –both health care personnel and patients. The result is expected to be a local theory, which can develop to a more generalised theory.

Perspectives: It is expected that the results will highlight why and how technology can be implemented in practice. It is also the expectation that the project will create new knowledge about user involvement in the health care system with the introduction and implementation of technology and also illustrate the change in the distribution of roles between the participants of the healthcare system as a consequence of the change.

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