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Introduction

UST/AHEC Scholars Program is an interprofessional pilot program for students enrolled in UConn Schools of Pharmacy, Nursing, Medicine, Dental Medicine, Social Work, and Quinnipiac University's Physician Assistant Program. The program is a formal 2-year curriculum, focused on the vulnerable underserved communities. Students gain exposure to challenging issues of healthcare and develop competencies such as advocacy, health policy, quality improvement, etc..



Women's Health Interest Group is a network of interprofessional students that focus strictly on women which is one of the most vulnerable populations. Some women's health's topics discussed are:

- Advocacy and women's health – how to be an advocate, writing to legislators, testifying at public hearings, current legislation pertinent to our field
- History of OB/GYN and experimentation on under-represented minorities
- Racial disparities in OB/GYN care
- Maternal morbidity and mortality

Methods

- Scheduled monthly virtual meetings via Zoom with student taking different roles as team leaders, community outreach, academic liaison, etc..
- On each meeting, we invite experts from different facilities to present different insights and ideas, clinical data and discussions that lead to a more understanding and better experience on providing care for this particular group of patients
- Goals:
 - Understanding current best practices for women especially during Covid
 - Increase the awareness of maternal morbidity and mortality, racial disparities in OB/GYN care
 - Advocacy for women, learn how to write to legislators, testify at public hearings.

Results:

- There were 2 guest speakers are the women's IG and total of 16 team members
- Topics have been discussed:
 - Protect and support black women during pregnancy
 - Vaccination for pregnant and lactating women against COVID 19
 - Support and protect all moms and babies.

During COVID 19

Vaccinating Pregnant and Lactating Patients Against COVID 19 key information: American College of Obstetrician and Gynecologists recommends that COVID 19 vaccines should not be withheld from pregnant individuals who meet criteria for vaccination, and it should be offered to lactating individuals similar to non-lactating individuals

- At least two vaccines have been approved for emergency use authorization by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and several more are under development.
- The current vaccines use mRNA technology. They do not contain a live virus like some other vaccines.
- A conversation with a clinician is helpful but should not be rewired prior to vaccination as it may cause unnecessary barriers. Some considerations:
 - The level of activity of the virus in the community
 - Potential efficacy of the vaccine
 - Risk and potential severity of maternal disease
 - Safety of vaccine for the pregnant patient and the fetus.
- Pregnancy testing should not be a requirement prior to receiving any approved COVID vaccine
- Pregnant patients who decline vaccination should be supported in their decision, remind about the importance of other prevention measures such as hand washing, physical distancing, masks.
- After the discussion we can better understanding statistics, information and apply it into practices with pregnant women during pandemic

Protect and support Black women during pregnancy

- It is a sobering statistic that has been said many times: Black / African-American women are three to four times as likely to die during childbirth as compared to White women. How does the learning about this and other racial disparities in health care during our education change us emotionally? What do you do with that energy?
- What can we do to protect and support black women mentally and emotionally during pregnancy?
 - The importance of motherhood community
 - Centering Pregnancy
 - The JJ Way
 - Doula Care
 - Home births
- Journal article: *"This isn't another horror story about black motherhood"*
- Book discussion: *"Medical Bondage"*



From discussions: acknowledge that most pregnancy-related deaths are preventable, and we should work together to reduce disparities. Although the statistic is terrifying but there is still hope for all pregnant women including black community that our healthcare is going to get better.

Support Mom and Babies

- Dr. Jordana Frost's presentation on March of Dimes: campaign to increase awareness of danger to mom and babies :
 - support research, lead programs and provide education and advocacy so that every mom and baby can have the best possible start.
 - Building on a successful 80-year legacy of impact and innovation, empowering every mom and every family.
 - Different ways to engage with policy maker, stakeholders, improve maternal health and fetal mortality



Conclusion and Future Direction

- Women experience unique healthcare challenge and more likely to be diagnosed with certain diseases than men, it is even more challenging for women of colors and minorities. Maternal mortality and injury rates are much higher for black females, irrespective of income or educational levels. Race-related health disparities re among the starkest and most resistant to progress. Participating in this project, we had he privilege to better understand why Black women are facing a higher infertility rates, greater stigma and larger barriers to accessing care for reproductive challenges.
- Future directions:
 - Anti-racism or bias training and focusing meetings
 - Research health outcome for Black mothers
 - Advocate for better registration o reduce black maternal mortality
 - Events and provide resources

References

1. CT AHEC Program at UConn Health Center
2. Urban Service Track/AHEC Scholars Program
3. h.uconn.edu/UST
4. <https://www.acog.org/en/clinical/clinical-guidance/practice-advisory/articles/2020/12/vaccinating-pregnant-and-lactating-patients-against-covid-19>
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