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Title: Promoting exclusive breastfeeding in the context of HIV: What do nurses at the frontline have to say?

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Introduction

South Africa's PMTCT policy first made provision for anti-retroviral treatment of HIV exposed infants in 2010 and, placed stronger emphasis on EBF as a safe feeding option than past versions which promoted the overwhelming and indiscriminate uptake of Exclusive Formula Feeding amongst HIV positive mothers.

The researcher set out to explore the perceptions of the policy implementers, i.e. Primary health care nurses, with regard to their role in the promotion, protection and support of breastfeeding in the context of policy change.

Methods

Focus group discussions were employed to explore the perceptions of nurses involved in Maternal and Child Health Care (MCHC) at PHC facilities in a peri-urban farming community.

The audiotaped proceedings were transcribed and translated by the researcher. Transcripts were studied to identify key issues/themes emerging from the data. An interpretive approach was applied in analysis of the data.

Results

Nurses expressed enthusiasm about the potential of revised PMTCT policy to reduce stigma related to formula feeding but also voiced confusion and concern about the risks and dangers that they believe may still exist. They viewed the lack of commitment of young mothers coupled with the strong influence of grandmothers over their infant feeding decisions as a major barrier to their efforts to promote exclusive breastfeeding and also made valuable suggestions for improving EBF promotion strategies in general.

Conclusions

These nurses should be targeted for training and support in order to overcome the uncertainties created by past policies and practices and become confident promoters of EBF.