The role of counseling for obstetric fistula patients: lessons learned from Eritrea.

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The role of counseling for obstetric fistula patients: lessons learned from Eritrea.

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Abstract

OBJECTIVE: The goal of this study was to evaluate the first formal counseling program for obstetric fistula patients in Eritrea.

METHODS: To evaluate the impact of the counseling program, clients were interviewed both before pre-operative counseling and again after post-operative counseling. A questionnaire was used in the interviews to assess women's knowledge about fistula, self-esteem, and their behavioral intentions for health maintenance and social reintegration following surgical repair. In addition, two focus groups were conducted with a total of 19 clients assessing their experiences with the surgical care and counseling.

RESULTS: Data from the questionnaires revealed significant improvements in women's knowledge about fistula, self-esteem, and behavioral intentions following counseling. Focus group data also supported increased knowledge and self-esteem.

CONCLUSION: Evaluation of the short-term impact of an initial formal counseling program for fistula patients in sub-Saharan Africa affirmed the positive effects that such a program has for fistula patients, with increased knowledge about the causes of fistula, fistula prevention and enhanced self-esteem.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS: Culturally appropriate counseling can be incorporated into services for surgical repair of obstetric fistula in low-resource settings and has the potential to improve the physical and mental well-being of
women undergoing fistula repair.

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