Resident Gynaecologists’ Attitudes towards the Inclusion of the Screening for Gestational Diabetes into the Maternity Directive: A Qualitative Study

Die Aufnahme des Screenings auf Gestationsdiabetes mellitus in die Mutterschaftsrichtlinien aus Sicht niedergelassener Gynäkologen: Eine qualitative Studie

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Background: Gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM) is known to be one of the most frequent complications during pregnancy and constitutes an increased risk for pregnant women (e.g., higher risk of Caesarian section, pre-eclampsia, and future diabetes) and the fetus (e.g., higher risk of preterm birth, excessive birth weight, future diabetes). In March 2012, the screening for gestational diabetes was included as a two-step screening into the German maternity directive saying that every pregnant woman should be offered a glucose challenge test (GCT; 50-gram-screening-test) as part of the prenatal checkups. However, up to now it is unclear, what resident gynecologists, who are affected directly by this change in the maternity directive, think about the inclusion of the screening and the kind of screening introduced.

Methods: In order to approach this topic from a scientific point of view, 17 gynecologists in the German cities Mannheim, Ludwigshafen, and Heidelberg were interviewed face-to-face by the first author (KD; PhD, female sociologist) using a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions (mean interview length: 33:12 minutes). All interviews took place from December 2013 till February 2014. They were audiorecorded, transcribed verbatim (191 pages), coded by two independent reviewers (KD and TG), and analyzed using qualitative content analysis.

Results: The majority of the gynecologists supported the introduction of the screening into the maternity directives. However, some gynecologists felt that this amendment is not strong enough (Figure 1). Especially the GCT with 50 g glucose was criticized, for example as being “deficient in sensitivity” (gynecologist 13) and "liable to oversee some cases" (gynecologist 9). Many gynecologists would prefer an oral glucose tolerance test (OGTT, 75 g glucose). But there were also some gynecologists who thought that the OGTT would strain pregnant women too much and thus deemed it unsuitable for a screening.

Discussion: In the framework of this qualitative study, resident gynecologists – the main actors in the conduct of the screening – had the possibility to offer their opinion on this current topic for the first time. The results provide a first insight into the conduct of the screening and may serve as a basis for larger, quantitative studies on this important screening applying to 650.000 pregnant women in Germany every year.

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Fig. 1 Critical voices of gynecologists concerning the amendment in the maternity directive (Source: Qualitative Interviews with 17 resident gynecologists).