

Patient Pregnancy Intentions: Are Providers Asking?

Few studies have examined the extent to which health care providers **ask patients if or when they want to become pregnant**. To address this gap, Planned Parenthood researchers assessed documentation of pregnancy intentions in patients' electronic health records (EHR) in a study published in the *Maternal and Child Health Journal*. The study found that about 9 out of 10 female patients (93%) had their pregnancy intentions recorded in the EHR in 2014. Understanding patients' pregnancy intentions can inform birth control counseling and pre-pregnancy care. For more on this study and Planned Parenthood research, go to plannedparenthood.org/about-us/newsroom/research-planned-parenthood.

The Study

- Researchers used electronic health record (EHR) data from **627,399** female patients visiting 214 Planned Parenthood health centers in 2012-2014.
- Female patients were included in the study if they did not have any record of infertility, menopause, or sterilization.
- In the EHR, providers could document responses to the prompt: **"Planning a pregnancy in the next year?"** Response categories were 'yes' or 'no.' Researchers considered either a 'yes' or 'no' response to be a documented pregnancy intention.
- Researchers examined trends in documentation of pregnancy intentions over time and whether the **birth control method** selected at the visit differed by pregnancy intention.

Who Participated

- Over half of patients included in the study were ages 20-29 years (**56%**); patients ranged in age from 15-49.
- Most patients were Hispanic (**42%**) or non-Hispanic White (**39%**); **9%** were Black, and **7%** were Asian or Pacific Islander.
- Most patients had public insurance (**85%**) and had never given birth (**65%**).

The Results

- In 2014, documentation was near universal, suggesting that providers *are* asking. **About 9 out of 10 female patients (93%) had their pregnancy intentions recorded** in the EHR. This percentage is higher than similar studies. There were no differences in documentation by patient characteristics such as age, race/ethnicity, insurance type, and history of giving birth.
- Among patients with a documented pregnancy intention, **97% were not planning a pregnancy** in the next year. This is not a surprising finding, given that patients were visiting family planning health centers.
- Still, **3% were planning a pregnancy**—this percentage translates to thousands of women across the country. Planned Parenthood can play an important role in helping patients to prepare for healthy pregnancy.
- Women not planning a pregnancy were more likely to use a most effective birth control method (e.g., IUD, implant) or moderately effective birth control method (e.g., pills, patch, ring, shot, diaphragm) than those planning a pregnancy (**73% vs. 35%**).
- Even among those planning a pregnancy, **35%** were using a method (presumably because they were not trying to get pregnant immediately). Providers can offer both contraceptive and pre-pregnancy services to meet patients' immediate and long-term needs.
- Patient pregnancy intentions are **complex and change over time** – it is important to consider how this might affect pregnancy intention documentation and clinical care.