

Involving Fathers in Ante-natal Screening for Sickle Cell Disorders: Improving Informed Decision Making

Recommendations from the Project for Health Care Professionals: Testing Men

- ⊕ Men related numerous barriers to access services. Make fathers feel welcome, valued and respected.
- ⊕ Ensure services are accessible to working fathers and young fathers.
- ⊕ The test is a polite invitation. Fathers, however, sometimes felt under pressure to have this test. Facilitate choice and discuss the options with families. Fathers appreciate this.
- ⊕ Has dad received the *Tests for Dads* leaflet or an NHS letter inviting him to get tested? Does he have any questions? Does he know what sickle cell is?
- ⊕ Fathers find ante-natal care confusing. Have you explained why you are doing the test? And discussed the pros and cons of testing?
- ⊕ Have you explained that this test is just for sickle cell and nothing else? If a dad wants a HIV test or STI test refer him to GP or STI clinic.
- ⊕ Show men exactly what you are going to do with their blood, explain how it will be kept and illustrate the labelling. Fathers said they were reassured by such explanations. Explain how long results will take.
- ⊕ Draw attention to what happens if results show he is carrier. Ensure that he can always have someone to contact if he has questions.

- ⊕ Father can sometimes be anxious about fatherhood. This is their priority rather than agreeing to have a test. Reassure them.
- ⊕ Fathers understand why ante-natal care focuses on the mother. They would, however, like to see more couple centred approaches, in which they can express their needs.
- ⊕ Understand that some men may refuse testing. This is their choice. They may test at another time or never at all. Ensure that fathers are aware they can make choices.
- ⊕ You can probe to find out why a man refuses testing. Be non-judgemental and ask if he has concerns about needles or what a blood test may reveal.
- ⊕ Ask if he has been tested before and where. Extra sensitivity is needed if a father is identified as being from a country that has a high incidence of faulty tests or where counselling is required before marriage.
- ⊕ Ensure fathers have access to balanced information on the life of someone with a sickle cell disorder. For example, explain that new born screening enables early treatment and precautions to be put in place to best care for their child. In this respect, the voluntary sector can be an important source of information about the about the lives of families with a child with sickle cell.

A copy of the final report and resources can be found at:

http://www.york.ac.uk/media/healthsciences/documents/research/public-health/23116_A4_report%20v3.pdf

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) under its Research for Patient Benefit (RfPB) Programme: Yorkshire and Humber (Grant Reference Number PB-PG-0610-22196) and undertaken by the University of York in partnership with the Sickle Cell Society and De Monfort University. The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NHS, the NIHR or the Department of Health.