The Role of Fathers in Children’s Health

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Webinar begins at 2pm EST/1pm CST/12pm MST/11am PST
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The Milwaukee Fatherhood Initiative is a collaborative effort between City of Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett and numerous partner organizations assisting fathers in helping their children to thrive.

The central areas of focus include men’s health, healthy child development, employment, legal navigation, child support services, driver’s license recovery, continuing education and more. The core belief is that positive father involvement strengthens child, families and communities.

The Direct Assistance For Dads (DAD) Project is a unique home visiting strategy for expectant fathers and fathers of young children offered through the City of Milwaukee Health Department.
Craig Garfield, MD, MAPP

Professor of Pediatrics, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine

Director, Family and Child Health Innovations Program (FCHIP), Lurie Children’s Hospital
New initiative to understand child health in the context of the family

“Because children thrive when parents thrive.”

Holistic approach to the family in all its diversity

– What brings us together
• Fathers’ influence on the health and development of their children
• Effects of paternal physical and mental health on child and family wellbeing
• Role of fathers in children’s healthcare
• Strategies for healthcare and child and family services providers to more effectively engage fathers
• Questions and discussion
Who are fathers?

- Biological
- Stepfather
- Father figure

...in families ranging from married to cohabiting, single parent, and re-combined.

Notions of the role of a father are diverse, and may be influenced by cultural and demographic factors.
Fathers’ influence on the health and development of their children
Conceptualizing fathers’ preconception health

- Preconception health: “things men can do for their own health, as well as for the women and children in their lives” (CDC)
Partner support associated with positive maternal and child outcomes

- father involvement prenatally increases likelihood of mother receiving 1st trimester prenatal care

- women with supportive partners have fewer health problems in pregnancy

- the quality of the partner relationship predicts how both mother and father will nurture and respond to the needs of their child

From a Pediatrician, Lessons for Dads-to-Be

The class is part of a broader effort to shed scientific light on fathers’ roles in child and family well-being.

Fathers react to a vivid childbirth video in Dr. Craig Garfield’s class for expectant fathers at Northwestern. Randy Belice

By Anahid O’Connor

June 14, 2018

CHICAGO — In a conference room at Northwestern Memorial Hospital on a recent evening, a group of men sat down for a class on pregnancy and childbirth led by Dr. Craig Garfield, a pediatrician who specializes in studying new fathers.
Fathers influence child health and development via…

- Parenting behavior
  - Engagement in caregiving and play
  - Participation in decision-making,
    ensuring that children are cared for
- Children’s diet / nutrition, sleep, exercise, play

Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1987; Pleck, 2010;
Yogman, Garfield, & AAP Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Heath, 2016
Positive father involvement is associated with positive social, emotional, and cognitive outcomes for children from infancy to adolescence, and into adulthood.

Amato, 1994; Deutsch, Servis, & Payne, 2001; Flouri & Buchanan, 2003; McBride, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Ho, 2005; Mosley & Thomson, 1995; Parke et al., 2002; Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, & Bremberg, 2007; Volling & Belsky, 1992; Yeung, Duncan, & Hill, 2000
Effects of paternal mental and physical health on child and family wellbeing
Paternal depression

- Heightened in the period surrounding the birth of a child
- Highly correlated with maternal depression
- Negatively impacts co-parent relationships, parenting interactions & parent-child relationships
- Associated with poorer emotional and behavioral outcomes in childhood and adolescence
- Fathers with depression may present differently than mothers
- Limited awareness of paternal PPD

Yogman, Garfield, & AAP Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Heath, 2016; Walsh, Davis & Garfield, 2020
Influence of fathers’ health on child and family health

• Fathers’ health behaviors (e.g., immunization) have direct impact on infant and child risk

• Unhealthy habits in fathers may be more impactful for children

• Health conscious fathers may benefit families and children
  – Improving overall family functioning
  – Shaping the family environment and norms
  – Improving family financial situation
Role of fathers in children’s healthcare
Defining father involvement in children’s healthcare

- Increased role during pregnancy, labor, and delivery
- Attendance at well-child and acute care visits
- Healthcare decision making
- Treatment adherence
- Managing chronic conditions

Yogman, Garfield, & AAP Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Heath, 2016
In qualitative studies with expectant and new parents:

- Mothers and fathers want and expect fathers to be involved in prenatal and pediatric care
- Participation is highly meaningful to fathers
- Dual role as parent and partner
- Some fathers feel marginalized or uncertain of how to engage
- Fathers identify specific knowledge needs related to engaging with infants / toddlers / very young children

Walsh et al., 2014; Walsh, 2020; Walsh et al. Under review
Key findings of quantitative research on father engagement in prenatal and pediatric care

In a nationally representative sample of men aged 18-35 (N=1303):

- 88% of fathers attended at least one prenatal ultrasound
- 81% of fathers attend pediatric visits sometimes, often, or always
- Prenatal engagement positively associated with participation in pediatric care
- Gaps in knowledge of early development

Lee et al., Under Review; Walsh et al, Under Review
Fathers’ experiences in prenatal & pediatric settings
Significance of father involvement in children’s healthcare

• Differences in measures obtained separately from mothers and fathers suggest importance of multiple perspectives

• Father participation in care associated with higher treatment adherence, better family adjustment

• Healthcare seeking behaviors are highly correlated among family members

Schor, Starfield, Stidley, & Hankin, 1987; Wysocki & Gavin, 2004; Yogman, Garfield, & AAP Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2016
Strategies for healthcare and child and family services providers to more effectively engage fathers
Learn more about fathers’ experiences, circumstances, involvement and needs

• Research with fathers

• Ask individual fathers
Why survey fathers?

- Fathers play a key role in the health and development of their children; Father health status and behaviors influence decisions about pregnancy, women’s health, and infant and early child development

- Postnatal father involvement
  - better pre/postpartum maternal health
  - better child developmental outcomes

- Very little research has examined:
  - roles, behaviors of expectant fathers
  - father’s influence on maternal and child health
  - effect of transition to fatherhood on paternal health

Known challenges:
- RR Men<Women
- Father may be unknown or contact information missing on birth certificate
- Contact info for non-residential fathers limited

• Population-level survey to examine men’s health, attitudes, and experiences prior to and after becoming a father
• Collects comprehensive information about fathers before and after the birth of their child
• Non/resident fathers
• Links between paternal factors and pregnancy outcomes
• Builds on success of PRAMS methodology


PRAMS For DADS

THE BEST SOURCE OF DATA ON FATHERS AND BABIES
Randomized Pilot Study - 2 Study Arms

PRAMS for DADS

Mothers-as-Gatekeepers (MAG) approach
Survey included in mother’s packet for completion by father

Direct-to-Dad (DTD), paternal-focused approach
Survey sent in separate envelope to father’s residence

THE BEST SOURCE OF DATA ON FATHERS AND BABIES
Materials

• Graphic design for Dad survey cover and Dad and Family mail envelopes consistent with Georgia PRAMS materials
Sampled MOMS (n=1074)
10 batches, sampled from 10/15/2018 to 07/09/2019

Excluded (n=217)
Fathers not indicated on birth certificate and no paternity acknowledgement form

Sampled DADS (n=857)
Fathers identified by marriage or paternity acknowledgement on the birth certificate

Data not shown (n=151)
Data collection ongoing for fathers in last two batches

Data collection complete (n=706)
8 batches, sampled from 10/15/2018 to 05/07/2019

Direct to Dad (n=352) (49.9%)

Mom as Gatekeeper (n=354) (50.1%)
Barriers that need to be removed

Beliefs that act as barriers

– Father participation is not important, extra / optional
– Father-child relationship is secondary
– Fathers’ capacity to be caregivers is limited
– Fathers as risk factors

Provider barriers

– No active invitation to fathers to participate
– Biases
– Discomfort or uncertainty engaging fathers

Additional barriers

– Competing responsibilities, particularly work related
– Tension with child’s mother

Ahmann, 2006; Garfield & Isaaco, 2006; Harknett, Manno, & Balu, 2017; Minnesota Fathers and Families Network, 2011; Moore & Kotelchuk, 2004; O’Donnell et al., 2005; Phares, Fields, & Binitie, 2006; Yogman, Garfield, & AAP Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Heath, 2016
Strategies for involving and engaging fathers

- Extend a personal invitation to fathers; encourage participation in prenatal, delivery, post-partum and continued child health visits
- Communicate with fathers, including nonresident
  - Anticipatory guidance to all parents
- Presume high interest
- Encourage participation in caretaking activities
- Address practical barriers to engagement
- Create a family-friendly environment
- Reinforce fathers’ contributions and their role as model of health behavior
Strategies for involving and engaging fathers

- Programming where fathers are not outnumbered
- Allow families to define the father role
- Learn about and respond to fathers’ individual circumstances
- Normalize screening and discussing father-centered health concerns (e.g., depression)
- Offer resources to achieve parenting & related goals
- Collaborate with other providers
- Advocate for family friendly policies
- Moments of opportunity
Early and sustained father involvement benefits mothers, children and families.

Transition to parenthood may present unique opportunities to engage fathers in health reflection & change.

Support and encourage fathers’ development of caregiving capacities.

Promote overall health awareness and behaviors that will lead to a healthier environment for children.

Yogman, Garfield, & AAP Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2016
Interventions with Fathers

- Prenatal support
- Delivery involvement
- Smoking cessation
- Breastfeeding allies
- Parenting preparation
- Perinatal home visiting

- Parent education
- Parenting support
- Employment, literacy, economic stability
- Relationship enhancement / Co-parenting
- Depression screening
Questions and Discussion
Thank You!

www.preventionboard.wi.gov

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Photo credit: Alameda County Father Corps’ Fatherhood Photo Bank
https://www.diversityoffatherhood.com/
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