

CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Connecting2u Text Messaging Intervention: Connecting baby, family and community

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Connecting2u (C2u) is an innovative health promotion intervention led by the Centre for Children's Health and Wellbeing (CCHW), Children's Health Queensland. It is oriented on the priority life stage of the 'early years' and used SMS as an mHealth strategy to encourage and support parenting self-efficacy, attachment, parent health behaviour and parenting practices. As a novel intervention, it was piloted in 2014 in Logan. In 2015-2017 it was trialled across four birthing hospitals in South-east Queensland.

CCHW worked in collaboration with Griffith University (School of Medicine, Public Health), University of Newcastle (Family Action Centre), Mater Health Services, Metro-South Hospital and Health Services and a range of other health services and non-government organisation to determine the effectiveness of a family and infant health and wellbeing SMS intervention in supporting positive parenting behaviours in expectant and new parents birthing at partnered hospitals (Mater, Logan, Redlands, Beaudesert), in Queensland to influence children's health and wellbeing.

C2u is based on the Health Belief Model with text messaging as a cue to action and health behaviour change (Atun & Sittampalam, 2006). C2u uses the social cognitive theory constructs of self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations to inform the content of text messages to promote positive parenting practices (Evans, Wallace & Snider, 2012). Text messages are written from the baby's perspective to align with project objectives of attachment between mother and father and their unborn baby or infant.

Griffith University School of Medicine (Public Health) evaluated the intervention. The research was designed as a randomized controlled trial (RCT) and used both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

A total of 602 mothers and 226 fathers participated in the project. Findings from the impact evaluation show that the C2u trial intervention resulted in the significant increase in maternal confidence of first time mothers during the postnatal phase of the study. This finding is supported by the process evaluation findings, where first time mothers believed that the C2u messages helped them to feel more confident in feeding, playing with and caring for their baby.

Results from the process evaluation indicated that the SMS messages were well received by all mothers and fathers, particularly first time mothers and fathers, as they offered reliable, useful and relevant information in a convenient and timely manner. This confirms the importance of targeting the C2u intervention to first time parents who are new to the parenting experience and would benefit most from the intervention.

Findings pertaining to the delivery of the C2u project show that participants found the project to be supportive, informative and well delivered. Overall, it appeared that the content and delivery of text messages were appropriate, and information gained by participants was being applied to share information with partners, strengthen parents' connection with each other and their baby and to provide relief from the anxiety of new parenthood. Participants indicated that the text messages served as good reminders for things such as; what to take to the hospital, reminders about eating healthy, taking care of themselves and their partner and vaccination dates.

Keywords: health promotion; mHealth; infancy; development
