Quality of care in family planning: clients’ rights and providers’ needs

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Abstract

Quality of care means that the needs of the clients in the context of their personal life should be the major determinant of the behavior of the providers and the goal of the programs. Since family planning has been recognized as a right of individuals and couples, quality of care can be focused as a right of the client. Ten rights of family planning clients have been outlined by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) as follows. Rights to: information, access, choice, safety, privacy, confidentiality, dignity, comfort, continuity, and opinion.

The responsibilities for quality of care, and therefore fulfilling the rights of the clients, are distributed throughout the whole family planning program, but those who are actually seen as most responsible are the ones who are in direct contact with the clients – the service providers. A strategy for quality of care cannot be realistic without recognizing that service providers have their own needs which can be outlined as: training, information infrastructure, supplies, guidance, back-up, respect, encouragement, feedback, and self-expression.

When fulfilling the rights of the clients and needs of the service providers, both technical and human aspects should be taken into account.

The main aim of family planning is to improve the quality of life. During the last decade we have observed a growing interest among service providers and international groups in the quality of family planning services, both in response to the needs of clients, and the understanding that quality of care leads to an increased demand for and acceptability of family planning. Analysis of the concepts, principles, strategies and activities related to quality of care has been taking place [1–4]. Frameworks for guiding discussions and activities on quality of care have been proposed. The emphasis has been on making the perspective of the client the foundation on which service providers and policy makers should focus their activities. This perspective has considerably enlightened a field where the demographic and
public health priorities have been the previous main focus of attention. When we think of the client, we should keep in mind that decisions regarding sexual and reproductive behavior, including contraceptive use, are difficult for most people. These decisions have a major impact on personal and family life, both in the short and long term. They involve biomedical, cultural, socioeconomic and ethical considerations, some of them new and unknown to the client.

Quality of care means that the needs of the clients in the context of their personal life should be the major determinant of the behavior of the providers and the goal of the programs. Since family planning has been recognized as a right of individuals and couples, quality of care can be focused as a right of the client, extending the definition of the client not only to those who approach the health care system for services, but also to everyone in the community who is in need of services. In that sense, any member of the community who is of reproductive age should be considered a potential client for family planning services.

Clients' rights

The rights of family planning clients have been outlined by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) [5] as follows:

1. Right to information

All individuals in the community have the right to information on the benefits of family planning for themselves and their families. They also have a right to know where and how to obtain more information and services for planning their families. All family planning programs should be active in disseminating information about family planning. This should be done not only at service delivery sites, but also at the community level.

2. Right to access

All individuals in the community have a right to receive services from family planning programs, regardless of their social status, economic situation, religion, political belief, ethnic origin, marital status, geographical location or any other characteristics that may place individuals in certain groups. This right means a right of access through various health care providers as well as service delivery systems.

Family planning programs should take the necessary steps to ensure that services will reach all individuals who need them, even those for whom the normal health services are not easily accessible.