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What are the barriers for implementing psychosocial assessment in the private sector?

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Approximately 30-40% of obstetric women choose to deliver in the private sector in Australia. Compared to the public sector, women in the private sector are more likely to have an induction of labour, a caesarean section, an instrumental delivery and a longer postnatal stay. Obstetricians and midwives in the private sector note that the role of obstetricians in postnatal care is minimal. Psychosocial assessment, including depression screening, as part of perinatal care has been deemed good practice in the national clinical guidelines for perinatal depression and anxiety. However, little is known about psychosocial assessment in the private hospital sector. The primary aim of this study was to establish what is known about such assessment for women who choose private obstetric/maternity and postnatal care, particularly the availability and appropriateness of referral pathways and barriers to implementation. The study included implementing psychosocial assessment as part of the booking-in process at a regional private hospital in NSW. This presentation reports on the barriers encountered in introducing psychosocial assessment to the pilot site. Recommendations for how to identify and overcome some of these barriers will be presented, with the aim of facilitating the introduction of this assessment at other private hospitals. Access to information on risks to maternal and infant health is considered as fundamental privilege of antenatal care. Routinely assessing and measuring psychosocial risks and mental disorders are essential activities in evaluating the need to provide appropriate and timely responses to identified risks, to reduce infant mortality, preterm births and low birth weight infants. The perinatal period provides a unique opportunity to identify and intervene in perinatal anxiety and depression, partner violence, substance use problems, unresolved loss and other traumatic history. There is an increasing move internationally to standardize and make routine the psychosocial assessment and depression screening of all pregnant women.