

Healthcare Provider Outreach

Post-Campaign Evaluation
2002

In the Fall of 2001, The Folic Acid Alliance of Ontario conducted a pre-campaign fax-back survey among a random sample of 3,373 Ontario health professionals, including family physicians, obstetricians and gynaecologists, midwives and pharmacists. Responses were received from 539 family physicians, 181 obstetricians, 45 midwives and 373 pharmacists for a total response rate of 34%.

A post-campaign fax-back survey, targeted to the same group, was conducted in August 2002 and received 352 responses from family physicians and paediatricians, 10 responses from midwives, 35 responses from pharmacists, and 40 responses from obstetricians. The follow-up survey found that the original folic acid campaign had a positive impact in changing the understanding and practice of health professionals regarding folic acid.

Following the campaign:

- 90% of health professionals agreed strongly that pre-conceptional folic acid can help reduce the risk of neural tube defects (up 15%);
- 70% always or often discussed the connection between folic acid and neural tube defects (NTDs) with their patients (up more than 35%);
- more health professionals strongly agreed the risk of NTDs can be reduced by consuming a folate-rich diet and a multivitamin supplement that contains folic acid (up almost 50%); and
- 87% were counselling high-risk patients differently (up 18%).

Regarding the campaign:

- 71% of health professionals recalled the folic acid awareness campaign and the majority recalled receiving the campaign posters and brochures;
- 92% of those who recalled receiving the posters and brochures made them available to their patients;
- 19% said they were counselling their patients differently as a result of the folic acid information, and were counselling more women earlier (before pregnancy) and more frequently; and
- nearly 60% said their patients had asked them for information on folic acid in the past 6 months.

While understanding and behaviour has changed in some areas regarding the practice of recommending folic acid, there still remain a few areas for continued education:

- only 63% of health professionals correctly recommended 0.4 milligrams (mg) of folic acid daily for women at low risk of having a child with an NTD (no significant change);



- most are not consistently recommending taking folic acid a minimum of three months prior to conception; and
- many health professionals cannot accurately identify food sources of folate.

Without an ongoing commitment from health professionals across the province—from family physicians and obstetricians to nurses and dieticians—the work we have done and the milestones we have achieved cannot be sustained. With misinformation out there countering the message that at least 0.4 mg of folic acid each day can safely reduce the risk of having a baby born with a NTD, SB&H continues to need the help of health professionals to tell every woman of childbearing age they know to take a multivitamin containing folic acid, and to recommended an increased dosage for those women at the highest risk of having a child with an NTD.

For more information, visit www.folicacid.ca.

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