Immigrant Parents' Knowledge of Paediatric Preventative Health Care in Hong Kong: A Pilot Study

SK Tang, JE Dodgson, M Tarrant

Abstract

Background: Over 14,000 children arrived in Hong Kong from Mainland China last year to join their recently immigrated parents. The aims of this pilot study were to explore immigrant parents' knowledge and perceptions of the accessibility of paediatric preventative health care services. Method: A descriptive survey was administered to parents. Participants (N=27) were grouped by their child's point of entry into the health care system. Results: Most participants lacked knowledge about well-child care and health education. Participants whose children lived in Hong Kong for longer than one year used services for well-child care significantly more than those with shorter stays ($\chi^2=4.50; p=0.03$). The major barrier in accessing services was lack of knowledge. Conclusions: Although a preliminary study, the results suggest a population-based study is needed because lack of familiarity with available services was a reoccurring finding. A more comprehensive assessment of the learning needs of this population is needed so effective ways of familiarising new immigrants and tracking these children can be developed.

Key words

Children; Hong Kong; Immigrants; Immunisations; Preventive health

According to the WHO, preventative health behaviours are essential to maintaining a healthy society. Preventative health care is a fundamental aspect of paediatric care; its use and availability is frequently used as a health indicator. Yet a level of knowledge and understanding is required of individuals if preventative health services are to be utilised. Although the Hong Kong (HK) health care system provides a comprehensive range of these services for newly immigrated children and epidemiologic studies of immunisation rates in this population suggest adequate coverage, little is known about parental knowledge and perceptions of the range of paediatric preventative services in this vulnerable population.

Background

About 14,000 children arrive in HK from the Peoples's Republic of China (PRC) yearly to be reunited with their families. Generally immigrant parents are able to bring their children to HK within a relatively short period of time. New immigrant parents have many challenges as they adapt to life in HK, which may make them more vulnerable to illness. In addition to the many socio-cultural changes these parents' face, the health care system in HK operates quite differently than in the PRC. These differences may result in under-utilisation of available services, as immigrant parents may still be experiencing this adaptation process when their children join them. In addition, families of newly immigrant children may be reluctant to use existing social and health care resources that are unfamiliar. It has been suggested that these parents tend to protect their children and may not choose to use social services.