

Background

Positive benchmarking can serve as a catalyst for maternity care improvement.

Aim(s)

To retrospectively benchmark Flemish maternity care providers as well as explore their excellent characteristics and attributes, based on women's positive perinatal care experience.

Methods

The study consisted of a sequential two-phased mixed-methods study among Flemish pregnant and postpartum women. Rating scores and free text responses were used to benchmark the community midwife, the hospital midwife, and the obstetrician. Rating scores were categorised according to the Net Promoter Score (NPS): detractors, passives, and promoters. Kruskal-Wallis tests established the differences between types of clinicians and between antenatal, intrapartum, and postpartum Net Promoter Score mean scores. Bonferroni post hoc tests examined further significance. Content analysis was used to construct a final pool of keywords representing characteristics and attributes of care professionals, accumulated from the promoters' free text responses. Ranks were assigned to each keyword based on its frequency. The significantly different keywords benchmarking the different care providers, were visualised with word clouds.

Results

A total of 2385 Net Promoter Scale scores and 1856 free-text responses of 1587 responders were included. The community midwife received the highest NPS scores ($p < .001$) from the total sample. The promoters ($n=1015$) assigned community midwives the highest NPS scores ($9.67, \pm .47$), followed by obstetricians ($9.57, \pm .50$) and hospital-based midwives ($9.51, \pm .50$). The distinct benchmarking characteristics/attributes of community midwives were availability ($p < .001$), supportive ($p .04$) and personalised care ($p < .001$). Being honest ($p < .001$), empathy ($p < .001$) and being inexhaustible ($p .04$) benchmarked hospital midwives. Calmness ($p < .001$), a no-nonsense approach ($p < .001$), being humane ($p .01$) and comforting ($p .02$) benchmarked obstetricians.

Discussion

The findings indicate that all care providers are highly valued, but community midwives are ranked the highest. This seems the first study benchmarking different maternity care providers from a positive perspective, based on women's experiences.

Implications and future perspectives

Understanding the distinct differences between the care professionals can facilitate a positive culture in maternity services, serve as exemplary performance for professional development and shape the profiles of maternity care professionals.