

RESEARCH BASED TEMPLATE

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ALLIANCE (Quality Family Planning Services and Referrals in Community Pharmacy: Expanding Pharmacists' Scope of Practice): A protocol for a stepped-wedge trial

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Background:

Women experience barriers to accessing effective contraception with those seeking emergency contraception (EC) or early medical abortion (EMA) at higher risk of unplanned pregnancy. Community pharmacists in Australia have been dispensing EC over-the-counter since 2004 and about 10% also dispense EMA and are well placed to provide contraceptive counselling during these dispensing conversations, but lack the necessary training, suitable referral pathways, and remuneration to do so. ALLIANCE will determine whether pharmacist provision of patient-centred, effectiveness-based contraceptive counselling, in a billable consultation increases use of effective contraception and reduces unintended pregnancy amongst women seeking EC or EMA.

Methods:

ALLIANCE is a pragmatic stepped-wedge cluster randomised trial across three Australian states. Participating pharmacies will have a private consultation room. Women purchasing EC or MS-2 Step will be offered contraceptive counselling and referral to contraceptive providers when appropriate. Pharmacists will be supported through: online education, academic detailing (co-designed with consumers and pharmacy stakeholders), assistance with identifying referral pathways, peer-support through an online community of practice (AusCAPPS) and remuneration.

Women will complete an online survey at baseline, four months and twelve months post-consultation and 20 pharmacists and 20 women will be interviewed regarding their experiences of participating.

Results:

The primary outcome is self-reported use of effective contraception four months after EC or EMA. Secondary outcomes are rates of unintended pregnancy, abortion and

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continued contraceptive use at 12-months, and intervention cost-effectiveness. The process evaluation will seek to understand “what worked, for whom, in what circumstances, and why.”

Conclusion:

If successful, ALLIANCE will equip community pharmacists with the resources, networks, knowledge and skills to offer and deliver contraceptive counselling to women at increased risk of unintended pregnancy. This will increase uptake of effective contraception after EC and EMA and should lead to fewer unintended pregnancies for women, thereby addressing a key government priority.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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