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REPORT

Development of a health promotion programme to improve awareness of factors that affect fertility, and evaluation of its reach in the first 5 years

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Abstract Awareness among people of reproductive age about the factors that influence fertility and reproductive outcomes, including medically assisted reproduction outcomes, is generally low. To improve awareness about the potentially modifiable factors that affect fertility and reproductive outcomes, 'Your Fertility', a fertility health promotion programme funded by the Australian Government, was established in 2011. This paper describes the development and evaluation of the reach of the Your Fertility programme from its inception in 2011 to June 2016. Systematically recorded outcomes for the programme's key focus areas and Google Analytics data were collated. Key achievements include developing and maintaining an internationally renowned website that experiences high growth and demand for fertility-related information; by 2016, over 5 million users had viewed more than 10 million webpages, and over 96,000 users had engaged in programme messages across social media. Programme messages have reached more than 4 million Australian social media users, and a potential audience of 150 million through media coverage across more than 320 media features. More than 4200 education and health professionals have completed online learning modules, and external partnerships have been established with 14 separate organizations. Data collected over 5 years indicate that the Your Fertility programme meets a need for targeted, evidence-based, accessible fertility-related information. 

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Introduction

Several potentially modifiable factors influence reproductive function and outcomes. In particular, increasing parental age, smoking and obesity adversely affect the chance of conceiving spontaneously or via medically assisted reproduction (MAR) (Anderson et al., 2010; Augood et al., 1998; Campbell et al., 2015; Homan et al., 2007; Maheshwari et al., 2007; Utting and Bewley, 2011; Wiener-Megnazi et al., 2012a). These factors

also increase the risk of obstetric and neonatal complications (Marchi et al., 2015; Sartorius and Nieschlag, 2010; Schmidt et al., 2012; Wiener-Megnazi et al., 2012b; Wilding, 2015; Zenzes, 2000). Furthermore, evidence is emerging that obesity, smoking and other environmental factors can cause epigenetic changes in spermatozoa and oocytes which influence the developmental trajectory of the embryo and fetus, ultimately affecting the lifetime health of the child (Lane et al., 2014). Knowledge of, and the ability to recognize,

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the physical changes that occur before ovulation so that intercourse can be timed to coincide with the most fertile days in the menstrual cycle can improve the chance of conception and reduces the time to pregnancy (Ecochard et al., 2015; Stanford et al., 2002).

Awareness among people of reproductive age about the factors that influence fertility and reproductive outcomes, including MAR outcomes, is generally low. Studies among students in Canada, Israel, Sweden, Denmark, the USA, the UK and China indicate that most want, and expect to have, children but underestimate the impact of age on their chance of achieving their aspirations of parenthood (Bunting and Boivin, 2008; Chan et al., 2015; Hashiloni-Dolev et al., 2011; Peterson et al., 2012; Quach and Librach, 2008; Skoog Svanberg et al., 2006; Sylvest et al., 2014). Similarly, studies of men and women from the general population show that most have limited knowledge of the factors that influence fertility, and overestimate the ability of MAR to overcome age-related infertility (Bunting et al., 2013; Daniluk and Koert, 2013; Daniluk et al., 2012; Hammarberg et al., 2013; Lundsberg et al., 2014; Maeda et al., 2015; Maheshwari et al., 2008; Mortensen et al., 2012; Sørensen et al., 2016; Tough et al., 2006; Vassard et al., 2016). This indicates a need for more public education about the effects of age and health behaviours on reproductive outcomes to prevent infertility and allow people to fulfil their parenthood goals (Lemoine and Ravitsky, 2015; Lucke, 2015; Mazza et al., 2012). Evidence about the efficacy of fertility-related education interventions is emerging, with some studies reporting positive effects on knowledge (García et al., 2016; Stern et al., 2013; Wojcieszek and Thompson, 2013) and others reporting no change in knowledge (Daniluk and Koert, 2015).

Health professionals are expected to promote fertility awareness, reproductive life planning and preconception health optimization (Practice Committee of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine in collaboration with the Society for Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility, 2008; RACGP, 2012). It has also been suggested that sexual and reproductive health education should incorporate information about the limitations of the reproductive lifespan and how fertility can be protected (Kisby Littleton, 2012; Lucke, 2015; Pitts and Hanley, 2004). However, health and education professionals need time, up-to-date knowledge and educational resources to be effective in their role as fertility and reproductive health promoters (Hammarberg et al., 2016; Mazza et al., 2013; Moran et al., 2016).

An environmental scan in 2010 revealed no existing comprehensive fertility-related health promotion programme. Therefore, to improve awareness about factors that affect fertility and reproductive outcomes, and allow people to make informed and timely decisions regarding childbearing, 'Your Fertility', a fertility health promotion programme funded by the Australian Government, was established in 2011. The primary target audience of this programme is individuals of reproductive age who want to have children now or in the future. Healthcare and education professionals are a secondary target audience. The programme is based on health education principles which, according to the World Health Organization, comprise 'consciously constructed opportunities for learning involving some form of communication designed to improve health literacy, including improving knowledge, and developing life skills which are conducive to individual and community

health' (WHO, 1998). The Your Fertility programme has five key focus areas: (i) to develop, maintain and monitor the programme website; (ii) to conduct research to guide programme content, activities and dissemination strategies; (iii) to conduct community education events; (iv) to develop educational opportunities for professionals; and (v) to create value partnerships and effective collaborations. This paper describes the development and evaluation of the reach of the Your Fertility programme from its inception in 2011 to June 2016.

Materials and methods

Setting

The Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority (VARTA) in the state of Victoria, Australia is an independent not-for-profit statutory authority responsible for administering aspects of the Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act 2008 (Victorian Government, 2008). One of its roles is to provide public education and resources for the community and health professionals on matters relating to fertility and assisted reproductive technology. In 2011, the Your Fertility programme was initiated by VARTA after securing funding from the Australian Government. To deliver the programme, VARTA partnered with other not-for-profit organizations and formed the Fertility Coalition, comprising VARTA as lead agency, the Robinson Research Institute at the University of Adelaide, Andrology Australia and Jean Hailes for Women's Health.

Development and implementation of the Your Fertility programme

In the first 5 years of the Your Fertility programme, it had, on average, 1.2 full-time equivalent employees consisting of 0.7 project managers, 0.2 media and communications officers, and 0.3 scientific writers. Together with the VARTA leadership and members of the partner organizations in the Fertility Coalition, these individuals developed and delivered the programme. Development and implementation of the programme was further assisted by a reference group, consisting of eight members representing organizations with an interest in fertility health, and an advisory group, with nine representatives from different areas of expertise including public health, general practice, gynaecology, andrology, family planning, MAR, research, obesity, fitness and multiculturalism.

Evidence to inform programme content, activities and dissemination strategies is drawn from the published literature, and qualitative and quantitative research conducted as part of the Your Fertility programme's activities in 2011, 2013 and 2015. Based on the evidence that most people use the internet to source health information (Diaz et al., 2002), a website was created to serve as the main platform for dissemination of programme information and resources (www.yourfertility.org.au). The website is mobile-friendly, can be accessed on mobile telephones and other mobile devices, and the content is written in accessible language and based on up-to-date evidence. Initially, it focused on the most common potentially modifiable factors that affect fertility and reproductive outcomes, such as parental age, obesity, smoking, alcohol consumption, and when in the menstrual cycle a woman is most likely to conceive. Over time, the

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