Project: PREKNOP (Preconception Reproductive Knowledge Promotion)
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According to a study published in American Journal of Public Health, more than half of pregnancies in the United States are unplanned.¹ The Guttmacher Institute has estimated that 95% of unintended pregnancies in the United States are a result of contraceptive non-use, incorrect use or inconsistent use, while only 5% resulted from contraceptive failure.² This shows a lack of effective contraceptive use and education among U.S. women of reproductive age. There is a need for research to find out about the contraceptive patterns and habits of women in the United States, especially focusing on low-income women and ethnic minorities for whom the rate of unintended pregnancies is disproportionately high. Research studies can both help in educating and encouraging the subjects of the study, as well as helping future programs to plan their educational approach and tailor their emphasis to the aspects of contraceptive agents that are most important to women.

This summer, I have worked as a student research assistant with PREKNOP (Preconception Reproductive Knowledge Promotion), which is an education based research study. The participants are low-income women in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The data collection for the study consists of a series of home visits over the course of two years. At many of the home visits, the women were asked to complete a survey with questions about their contraceptive habits, their reproductive activity and their knowledge of women’s health. The program also taught the intervention group how to track their ovulation by following their menstrual cycle, using temperature graphs, charting vaginal discharge, and using ovulation test strips. The intervention group was taught about reproductive anatomy and pregnancy, as well as the different methods of contraception. The control group of women was taught about general women’s health, such as diet and exercise. As the study progressed, the home visits and surveys helped us determine whether the intervention group was learning about their bodies and applying what they learned in order to practice a healthier and safer reproductive lifestyle.

Because the study targets ethnic minorities as well as low-income women, many of the women participating in PREKNOP are Spanish speaking. I have had the privilege to study abroad in Peru and to double major in Spanish as well as nursing at Calvin. It is an absolute joy to interact with the Spanish-speaking women in PREKNOP. It has been incredibly eye-opening to be a part of their education on such an important topic, and to get to hear a piece of their stories. I have witnessed God’s hand at work in PREKNOP through breaking down cultural barriers and crossing lines in order to expand our community. People from different backgrounds have so much to learn from each other, and it has been wonderful to be able to grow in this way throughout the summer.

I conducted a literature review about women’s reasons for choosing to switch from or discontinue a method of birth control. I used five electronic databases, and an adjusted version of the PRISMA guidelines to narrow my searches down to 16 articles. These articles outlined many different reasons that women decide to switch contraceptive methods. Some of the most prevalent reasons are
partner involvement, difficulty with access, cost, method dissatisfaction, health-related concerns, and perceived infertility.

As a research assistant, I have had a wide range of responsibilities, and learned a vast number of skills since joining the project. This includes scheduling and participating in home visits, performing a literature review, using software relevant to research such as Qualtrics and Quickbase for data entry as well as organizing and preparing paper files for use and analysis. I have also participated in data cleaning. These tasks have taught me many more subtle skills as well, such as improving interpersonal skills through interacting with the PREKNOP women and other researchers, taking initiative in my own learning, and developing a perspective of thankfulness to God for the privilege of attending college and for learning opportunities like PREKNOP.