

Promoting Cultural Capital in a Medical Camp for American Indian Youth with Diabetes [Abstract]

Jennie R. Joe

Type 2 diabetes mellitus, a disease that previously was characterized with an onset in the fourth decade of life or later, is now being diagnosed in children, particularly children from minority groups, including American Indians. Because children with the disease are frequently asymptomatic, they tend to ignore recommendations from their health care providers about appropriate self-management behaviors, thus increasing their risk for early onset of secondary complications, including retinopathy and end-stage renal disease. This problem with self-management can in part be attributed to a lack of knowledge as well as to denial about their disease.

This article describes an intervention that encourages and motivates American Indian youth with type 2 diabetes to improve their diabetes self-management. The Medical Wellness Camp is a partnership program hosted by several Arizona tribes and the University of Arizona. The camp provided these youth with the education and the skills needed to prevent or delay diabetes-related complications that will negatively impact their quality of life. This camp is unique because it builds on and integrates an intertribal "cultural capital" model to help them learn how to adopt the lifestyle changes necessary to live with this chronic disease. The program emphasis is on education, not research. This position honors the wishes of tribal partners whose communities have been reluctant to involve their children in research, a reluctance fueled by reports about unethical research practices that have harmed other tribal communities.

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