

A Success Story...

IMPROVING THE EDUCATION OF ABORIGINAL HEALTH WORKERS IN UNDERSTANDING DIABETES

Diabetes: Systematic and proactive care and team building

Nguiu Health Service- NT

This case study is about the creative and innovative ways Nguiu Health Service is implementing the Collaboratives Change Principles around being systemic and proactive in managing the care of people with Diabetes and incorporating building the practice team.

The aim was to improve Aboriginal Health Worker (AHW) understanding of diabetes through improving their own health and as a result their effectiveness with other Diabetic patients.

All clinic staff have engaged in Diabetes education and management, trialling Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSAs) cycles around healthy food preparation and diet, participating in a 'Biggest Loser' competition against the other two Tiwi Island clinics and utilising local dance and walking group as exercise.



Context



Local footy - a favourite Islands past time

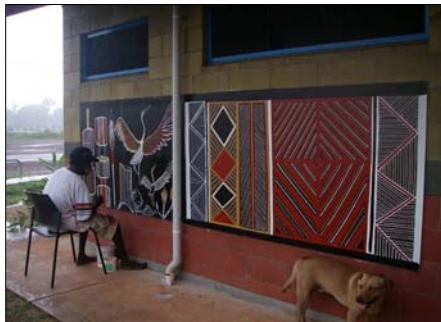
Nguiu is located on the south east corner of Bathurst Island, which is part of the Tiwi Island group, 80km north of Darwin (20 minutes by air). The population of the Nguiu community is approximately 1450; however the Health Service provides health care for over 2000 of the Islands inhabitants. The Nguiu Health Service was funded through a Catholic Mission grant in earlier days, with Northern Territory Government assistance in later years.

Given the high percentage of Indigenous patients, chronic disease is a major issue and a key factor in the Health Service deciding to participate in the National Primary Care Collaboratives. Most of the clinic staff have at least one chronic disease, all have partners and extended families.

Facilities in the Nguiu Community include a swimming pool complex, sports and recreation hall, football ovals, market garden and golf course, modern childcare centre, community transport and workshop facilities. AFL is a sport that is valued in this community and very popular, where most get involved either playing or as spectators. The Tiwi Island competition is of high quality and the people very passionate.

At the time when this case study was implemented, there was no resident GP on Bathurst Island, with a District Medical Officer visiting from Darwin twice per week. A Chronic Disease Coordinator had recently been employed four days per week and three Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Remote Area Nurses and up to three FTE Aboriginal Health Workers employed at the Nguiu Health Service. However the work force fluctuates considerably with a high turnover of staff and staffing numbers are often not at capacity.

The Situation



Tiwi Art – culture of the Islands

An area identified as a need within the Nguiu Health Service was team building, getting everyone involved in working together along with education of Aboriginal Health Workers around Chronic Disease. An innovative way of addressing both of these areas was looking at health of the clinic staff and putting strategies (PDSAs) in place to provide education on healthy eating and exercise in the form of healthy breakfasts weekly and exercise sessions.

To tackle the high incidence of chronic disease within the community a plan needed to be put into place and support from all of the clinic team. The strategies and goals fit well with the Nguiu Mission Statement:

*“Life is precious
Our country beautiful
Our dreamtime and culture important
Our workers of the health centre strive to provide a high standard of care.
To make this happen we all need to yoi (dance) to the same goals.”*

The Change

Driving this change was the visiting District Medical Officer, the Chronic Disease Coordinator and the visiting Dietician/Nutritionist. It was felt that education around Chronic Disease (primarily diabetes) needed to begin with the AHW and their health, which would in turn, flow over to their family and patients that visit the clinic.

Another area identified was the need to build the clinic team and it was decided that education would be in a way that would encourage team cohesion and hopefully address high staff turnover. With these issues in mind, it was decided to develop PDSAs, as this seemed to offer a ‘glimmer of hope’ incorporating the view of small steps at a time.

Weekly sessions were organised for all Health Workers, most of whom have diabetes. These sessions provided training and information that helped them not only manage their own conditions but also equipped them further to help other patients with diabetes and proved very successful. A healthy lunch was provided at these meetings, with health professionals such as Nutritionist, Podiatrist, Retinal Scan and also Self Management training.



Nguiu Clinic staff coming together to exercise

Another initiative was to hold healthy breakfasts with 20 clinic staff attending. The breakfast included performing Blood Glucose Levels on all staff. Three were identified with elevated readings and known diabetics had the opportunity to discuss their raised levels and the breakfast was great for team building with a chance to screen and do health checks.

A flow on from the breakfasts was adapting more traditional recipes with healthier ingredients for their meals at home. Damper which is regularly eaten by Tiwi Islanders was used with healthier alternatives such as wholemeal flour, apple and dried fruit to sweeten and provided for clinic staff at morning tea and for patients to try while waiting to be seen at the clinic. This had a very positive effect on the team and every one was discussing the change in the recipe and other ingredients that could be used.

The Change *continued...*

Providing education about the value of exercise in weight and Chronic Disease Management was another area of focus with the aim of building a stronger, healthier team. Hopefully this again will have the flow-on affect of healthier families and healthier patients.

The Chronic Disease Coordinator set up a walking group and gave out pedometers to those involved with the aim of encouraging them to walk more. Utilising local dance as a form of exercise was readily received and enjoyed by all. Local Nguiu clinic staff taught the dance to non-Indigenous staff. This was great for team building and everyone involved enjoyed the experience. The clinic team was also involved in a "Biggest Loser" Weight Loss Competition between the three Tiwi Island Clinics.

The Outcome

Through this innovative way of educating clinic staff on managing diabetes, staff began to learn about healthy eating and the importance of this combined with exercise. Clinic staff began to regularly check their Blood Glucose Levels (BGL), and two staff members managed to decrease their HbA1c levels significantly. One staff member even requested to start Insulin once they began to understand the need and health benefits of controlled BGLs.

The mental health team also became involved and stopped using sugar and now use Equal and low fat milk. Exercise was used in a way that was fun and incorporated traditional dance which empowered the Aboriginal Health Workers who were involved in passing on the dance to non-Indigenous staff.

All of this has built a fantastic success story; the message began to overflow to home life, with the clinic staff sharing their understanding and knowledge with family members and included them in eating healthier food options at home. The implementation of breakfasts and exercise groups within the Health Service has helped to build a better team environment and working together more effectively which has managed to be sustained. With all the Aboriginal Health Workers having extended families etc, the flow on effect to the wider community has been greater than first imagined.

Support Material

- By identifying a need and putting PDSAs in place, a Dietician/ Nutritionist visits regularly to the island from Darwin
- Diabetes Educator/Chronic Disease Nurse has been employed
- Parts of the Lifescrpts Resources have been utilised and the clinic is eagerly awaiting the Indigenous version.
- Biggest Loser Competition

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