

Chronic disease, medications and lifestyle and smoking: perceptions from a regional Victorian Aboriginal community

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It is well established that there is a disparity in health and health standards among Australian Aboriginal populations compared to non-Aboriginal groups and that life expectancy for Aboriginal people remains significantly lower than that for the non-Aboriginal population. Many Aboriginal people are medicated for chronic health conditions and it has been suggested that poor medication management may contribute to the increased morbidity and mortality of Aboriginal people. Much of the literature to date has focused on the perceptions of healthcare providers rather than on the perceptions of the Aboriginal people themselves, hence a paucity of available information regarding the perceptions of Aboriginal people and their management of chronic illnesses and medications. This study aimed to gather information about the perceptions of a group of Victorian Aboriginal people with diagnosed medical conditions requiring medications regarding their lifestyle, disease management and medication usage. Study participants represented a purposive sample of 20 Aboriginal people over 18 years of age, who attend a local Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service and who take medications as part of their chronic disease care. Participant interviews were conducted by Aboriginal Health Workers in a culturally appropriate and competent manner using a semi structured *yarning* process. Verbatim transcripts were validated by cross-check between members of the research group including the AHW research partners and coded for descriptive statistical analysis.

The data revealed participants' perceptions regarding the following broad categories: their medication knowledge and education; the effects and efficacy of their medications; lifestyle influences, including smoking, on their wellbeing; their use of medicines other than those currently prescribed by their medical practitioner; and the incidence of chronic illness in their family and community.

The findings may help facilitate better health outcomes for this population by: (i) informing healthcare providers about issues that are important to Aboriginal people in their medication usage and self management of chronic illnesses (ii) highlighting the inappropriate use of the term "non-complier" when describing Aboriginal people and (iii) promoting the efficacy of the delivery of care by the Aboriginal Health Services in order to inform mainstream healthcare providers of the role they can play to improve the use of medicines by their Aboriginal patients and support patient empowerment and self-management.

Presenter

Melissa Deacon-Crouch is a registered nurse and midwife and Senior Lecturer/BN Co-Coordinator in the La Trobe Rural Health School at La Trobe University, Bendigo, Australia. Melissa has a varied background as a Graduate Research Assistant, Research Nurse, Nurse Educator, Nursing and Midwifery Clinician and more recently, Nurse Academic. Her past research work mainly focused on colorectal cancer. Some of her current research interests include Indigenous health issues regarding the professional and self-management of chronic illness focusing on lifestyle factors and medication therapy. Melissa is also actively involved in the development of Nursing Curricula and the use of simulation in nursing education as well as innovation in teaching and learning through E-Learning.