Gomeroi gaaynggal: empowerment of Aboriginal communities to understand the health implications of research in pregnancy

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In recent times the work of many research teams around the globe, looking at all of the physiological systems indicate that the long-term health conditions seen in later life are programmed during intrauterine life. It is becoming increasingly important that pregnant women’s health is optimal to reduce the impact of maternal health on the development of diabetes, kidney disease and cardiovascular disease in the next generation.

The Gomeroi gaaynggal study in Aboriginal women in pregnancy is committed to understanding the stressors (physical, environmental, psychosocial) on the mother that impact on their health and on the long-term health of their infants. Aboriginal Australians are 70 times more likely to suffer end-stage renal disease and this study is one of the few to identify the underlying causes of this imbalance.

In a pilot study, the research team have identified the current renal status of our Aboriginal women in pregnancy. Reduced glomerular filtration rate occurred in 12.5% of women, 34% of our cohort had microalbuminuria and 37% had high plasma glucose levels. Our ongoing studies include ultrasound evaluation and determination of birth outcomes to analyse of the effect of maternal stressors on foetal renal development.

It is already apparent to the Gomeroi gaaynggal research team that Closing the Gap has to be a long-term investment by the researchers and by the Indigenous community in partnership. Empowering Aboriginal research participants to understand the data as it unfolds will assist with driving changes to improve health through education. Researchers need to commit to enduring community-based programs that directly feed their results into promoting health literacy.

More importantly, our ongoing promotion of health education through the Gomeroi gaaynggal ArtsHealth program has the potential to reduce the risks of chronic kidney disease in Aboriginal mothers and their children. Our presentation shows: preliminary data related to maternal renal health and foetal health outcomes; how the Gomeroi gaaynggal staff are empowering participants; and how the ArtsHealth program is developing health literacy.