Training for Indigenous health workers—lessons from a national breast cancer training workshop

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Breast cancer was the most common cancer reported for Indigenous women over the period 1997 to 2001, and is the second largest cause of cancer death for Indigenous women after lung cancer.\(^1\) Mortality from breast cancer is about 9% higher in Indigenous women compared with the Australian female population. Indigenous health workers are a vital link in providing information to assist the early detection of breast cancer in Indigenous women, ensuring they seek cancer care and also in supporting women and their families throughout their treatment and recovery.\(^2\)

In response to a need identified from discussions with Indigenous health workers and the lack of national training in breast cancer, the National Breast Cancer Centre held a breast cancer training workshop for Indigenous health workers from across Australia in Cairns in May 2006.

Feedback received from the attendees as part of the evaluation process indicated that the workshop had been very valuable in assisting them in their future work and in increasing their awareness of breast cancer. In addition, recommendations for future breast cancer initiatives and training workshops were identified by Indigenous health workers.

There were a number of elements that contributed to the success of this workshop, including diverse and targeted promotion, providing financial support for accommodation and travel where appropriate. Using both Indigenous and non-Indigenous presenters provided a varied program format, which incorporated personal stories and encouraged audience participation. Importantly the program was developed in consultation with members of the Indigenous community to ensure its relevance and acceptability.

References

Presenter

Helen Zorbas, MBBS FASBP, is Director of the National Breast Cancer Centre (NBCC). She has been responsible for directing a number of key national projects and programs in evidence-based practice, clinical guidelines, monitoring, service improvement and psychosocial support to improve cancer care. Helen has also been a member on a number of key national cancer and health committees and was recently appointed a member to the National Health Committee of the NHMRC for the triennium 2006 to 2009. Helen was also named a finalist in the 2006 Telstra Business Women’s Awards. In addition, Helen is a practising breast physician and has a staff specialist appointment at the Rachel Foster Breast Clinic, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney.