Supporting pregnant women in a First Nations community: the ENRICH First Nations Project

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International Meeting on Indigenous Child Health 2017
Presenter Disclosure

- Richard Oster has no relevant financial relationships with the manufacturer(s) of commercial services discussed in this CME activity.
- Richard Oster does not intend to discuss any unapproved/investigational use of any commercial product in this presentation.
Learning objectives

• Summarize the pregnancy-related health status of the First Nations population of Alberta, Canada

• Describe the methodology of a collaborative, community-based research project targeting improved pregnancy-related health

• Identify key features of effective prenatal care for First Nations women and of supportive First Nations fathers
ENRICH First Nations

- **Overall purpose**: gain an in-depth understanding of how to better support pregnant women in a large First Nations community, with the ultimate goal of improving pregnancy-related health

- Community-based participatory research (CBPR) project, and thus a collaborative partnership between the community and researchers forms the basis of the entire work
Maskwacis

• Rural community (not remote) approximately 90 kilometers south of Edmonton, within the area of Treaty Six; four Cree First Nations bands
• The registered population of the four bands is greater than 16,000
• Over 300 births per year
CBPR steps for *this* project

→ Previous research relationships
  → Community interest in improving pregnancy health
    → Engagement / Relationship building
      → Community Advisory Committee partnership
        → Community approval
          → Research agreement
            → Ethics / Research protocol
              → Dissemination
                → Strengthening community capacity
Partnership Core Values

- Respect
- Building and maintaining strong relationships
- Utilizing a strengths-based / positive focus
- Mutual benefits
- To “act now"
Research Objectives

• Based on previous community engagement and Community Advisory Committee meetings, our research objectives are to understand:

  1) Best practices for effective prenatal care for First Nations women

  2) How First Nations men support their partners during pregnancy

  3) The effectiveness of a community-based Elders mentoring program for pregnant women and their partners
Kikiskawâwasow - prenatal healthcare provider perceptions of effective care for First Nations women: an ethnographic community-based participatory research study

Objective

- **Objective**: Understand best practices for effective prenatal care for First Nations women

- 12 healthcare providers participated (nurses, dietitians, physicians, mental health therapist) in an ethnographic qualitative study
Results: Relationships and Trust: “It’s all about relationships”

- Building authentic relationships and trust with patients, particularly at the first visit, is the basis of effective care
  - support networks
  - reduce fear
  - Increase likelihood of attending appointments
  - Transcends typical patient-provider relationship
“It’s about building one relationship at a time. It’s about being a person. I don’t think anybody thinks of me as a health professional… You have to be genuine. But I think sometimes professionals might be way too much to the book… You are not supposed to hug people apparently. Oh well, you know what? If they need a hug, they are getting one. And yeah, you are not supposed to use affectionate terms. You know what? Some of my clients are my ‘dears’. Yep, some of them are my ‘sweeties’.”
Results: Cultural Understanding: “If you have never been out there, you really have no idea”

- All of the participants said there is a need for greater cultural understanding
  - strengthen patient-provider relationships
  - provide a more welcoming environments
  - develop provider compassion and awareness
  - encourage more appropriate care recommendations
Results: Cultural Understanding

- Those that were somewhat culturally sensitive learned it from their patients and from real life experiences with Indigenous people:

  “Cultural sensitivity training in a classroom is great, but I think it’s those relationships with community members, hearing someone tell their story is way more impactful”
Context-Specific Care: “It’s not one size fits all prenatal care”

• Providing more context-specific care breaks down barriers to care
  – a more open-door style of care; walk-ins
  – ability and willingness of staff to “stay open later just to accommodate certain people.”
  – “offer full service for prenatal care.”
Results: Context-Specific Care

• Not always possible within the healthcare system
  – Inflexible mainstream system doesn’t meet the women’s needs
    • built on structure, scheduled appointments, rules, policies, time management, order, etc.
  – Participants expressed feeling “frustrated”, “irritated”, “guilty”, “limited”, “discouraged”, and like their “hands are tied” when unable to provide care they felt essential
Implications / Changes in Practice

• Efforts are needed to repair and improve patient-provider relationships, focusing on investing time to develop enjoyable interactions, trust, mutual respect, and shared power

• HCPs, their organizations, as well as institutions involved in training of HCPs should acquire meaningful and positive cultural understanding of the Indigenous peoples they are working with

• Systems and clinics need to allow for more innovation, flexibility, and responsiveness in care approaches so that care is specific to their context.
Ohtâwîmâw Ispiciwin – Perceptions of supportive Cree fathers during pregnancy: findings from the ENRICH community-based participatory research study

Oster et al. 2017 In preparation
Objective

• “We need to hear from the men”

• **Objective**: understand how First Nations men support their partners during pregnancy

• 6 involved fathers participated in an ethnographic qualitative study that included interviews and a photovoice project
Pregnancy is an opportunity for reclaiming men’s roles and identities

- Participants felt above all they had to be there to help and support their partner

- Embracing the pregnancy and fatherhood as an opportunity for positive change in their life
Image 1. “It makes me not useless. I feel like I’m doing a good job. Even though I’m unemployed, I feel that I’m doing what I’m supposed to be doing right now. I’m where supposed to be. Obviously being an important person to somebody that needs you, being needed, it gives me purpose.”
Men need support too

• Without themselves being supported by others they were unlikely to be supportive to their partners

• Family support was crucial for the men, especially having a stable environment and a strong male role model during their childhood and development

• An equally significant source of support was maintaining a connection to faith and traditional culture during the pregnancy
"I had my mom in there too, and my sisters, and she had her mom there, and then my brother and his wife were in the waiting room. And that’s one of the things I like: I grew up like that (with family). We just have that connection, all of us. When someone is going through that phase in their life, they are there. I was glad to have them there."
Image 3. “I am exposing them to cultural events, I try to expose my children to the language. I try to tell stories about the land and try to get them to see the world through the lens of a Cree person, and as much as I can I make sure they use correct terms. Like my dad did”
Opportunities to foster supportive fathers-to-be are needed

• Many challenges and struggles faced within their community in order to be supportive partner.
  – More programs and other opportunities to support men are needed, particularly during pregnancy to “fill in the gap” (e.g. male Elder support)

• Programs are generally “women-focused”

• Broader reconciliation and improved relationships between theirs and surrounding communities
Implications / Changes in Practice

• Pregnancy is a chance for Indigenous men to reclaim their roles that have been lost as a result of the impacts of colonization

• Men cannot support their partner effectively unless they are themselves supported

• Indigenous men play a crucial role in pregnancy but are often left out

• Attempts to improve prenatal care for Indigenous women need to allow for more inclusion of male partners