AN INTERVENTION FOR STRESS IN AMERICAN INDIAN HEALTH CARE WORKERS

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Many American Indians experience difficult life situations that can lead to stress, disease and poor health. Their lives are frequently stress-filled related to socio-economic hardship, racism, tragedy, and health disparity. American Indian health care workers may experience additional stress arising from professional boundary challenges and the responsibilities as heads of household and family matriarchs. On a rural reservation, American Indian health care workers were recruited for implementation and evaluation of laughter classes to decrease stress as the focus of a Doctorate of Nursing Practice project. Martin’s humor-health theory guided the intervention. A certified laughter yoga instructor provided several weekly classes to a convenience sample of AI health care workers living in a reservation community. The Cohen Perceived Stress Scale and Cantril Self-Anchoring Scale questionnaires were used to assess pre and post class perception of stress and current and future quality of life; and a questionnaire was used to evaluate class satisfaction. Improvements were seen in decreased stress perception and quality of life. Overall participant satisfaction was good with moderate interest in attending more classes. Although an empirical link between laughter yoga and stress relief was not found, addressing American Indian health care worker health and well-being through laughter classes is an intervention that tribal employers may consider as part of worksite wellness.

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How project will help enhance evidence based practice:

According to the Agency for Healthcare and Research Quality (AHRQ) 2004 National Healthcare Disparities Report, which reflected several national data sources, disparities are pervasive in the United States, especially amongst American Indians (AI). These disparities reflect poor patterns of health for AI that may be an effect from suffering from high levels of stress. Although stress is a part of life and affects all human beings, a steady activation of the stress response wears down the body’s systems, potentially resulting in higher rates of disease and early death. Stress experienced even at low levels can increase a person's risk for chronic disease. AI people have used humor as a survival tool from long standing oppression of historic proportions. In this writer's experience, AIs find humor in many situations that others would not. Sometime it is at the most unexpected times. Humor and laughter seems to be a way to ease the pain. It seems that if they did not laugh so much, there would be much more despair. Laughter yoga can be recommended or taught by nurses as a stress relieving strategy. It is a suitable intervention for AI adults and studying the impact of laughter may contribute to evidence that it may decrease stress and, in the long term, improve health outcomes for AIs.

Reference:
References:
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Wilder Research (2009). Area Study on Race Relations