

Be Deadly, Get Healthy – An Opportunity for Exercise in the Aboriginal Community

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Background

Be Deadly, Get Healthy is an outreach exercise program targeting the Baw Baw Shire Aboriginal community. Gippsland Aboriginals are 13.9 times more likely to be admitted to hospital due to diabetes and 4.4 times for cardiovascular disease. It is estimated that in rural Victoria 26.5% of Aboriginal persons do not meet national physical activity (PA) guidelines (Department of Health, 2011). The aim of the program is to enhance health and overcome barriers to exercise in the Aboriginal community.

Methods

Community consultation determined barriers to exercise, motivational factors, preferred activities and venue. Barriers identified were cost, family and transport, which were overcome with support from local stakeholders. Referrals were received via general practitioners, community consultation and word of mouth. Individual assessment prior to group commencement was completed by the physiotherapist. A weekly program led by a physiotherapist and Aboriginal allied health assistant was commenced.

Results

25 participants enrolled in the group (18 adults, 7 children). All participants increased frequency, duration and intensity of exercise, with four meeting national guidelines for PA. 27% decreased their diabetes risk scores (AUSDRISK). Australian Quality of Life (AQoL) data showed 12 were within or better than the normative scores for their age and 6 were below normative values. All participants improved their social support scores for exercise.

Discussion

The program was a key factor in increasing PA levels and decreasing diabetes risk. AQoL scores varied throughout the program due to external factors including social, financial and medical issues. Increased social support scores, show a change in the attitudes within the community towards exercise, a major aim of the project. By breaking down the barriers to exercise it has created an opportunity for the Aboriginal community to increase their PA levels. The program has helped develop strong relationships between the hospital and the local Aboriginal health service. The programs positive changes have led to ongoing funding to continue for a further twelve months.