Utilizing Traditional Healing Practices with HIV/AIDS Treatment

Hannah Blue (Diné)
Lakota Hoksila “Robert Cross” (Oglala Titunwan)
March 15, 2013
“At one point in our culture, when you were sick you never left your house. Never looked for anyone outside of your community to help you. There was a point in our culture when we had the skills to provide healing.”
Health of Natives before contact was better than that of Europeans at the time
Smallpox
Influenza
Bubonic Plague
Measles
Typhus
Cholera
Malaria
Mumps
Yellow Fever
Hepatitis C
HIV/AIDS
Many “Modern” Practices Came From Indigenous Traditions …

- Coca plants- Andean Indians
  - Used for: Altitude sickness, skin treatment
  - Misuses: Cocaine
- Curare vine- Amazon Indians
  - Used for: Arrow poison, anesthesia, muscle relaxers
- Jaborandi plant- Amazon Indians
  - Used for: Herbal tea, Pilocarpine in treatment of glaucoma, dry mouth, and to diagnose cystic fibrosis
- Poplar or bark- North American Indians
  - Used for: Curing headaches, contains salicin, which is found in aspirin
- Echinacea (Elk Root)- North American Indians
  - Used for: Treating infections, wounds, cold remedies
The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 4 billion people—80 percent of the world population—use herbal medicine for some aspect of primary health care.

Seventy percent of urban AI/AN patients in primary care often used traditional health practices; use was strongly associated with cultural affiliation.

Studies in Canada have noted that more than a third of the medical staff in hospitals and nursing homes refer patients to medicine men/women.

In addition, recent years have witnessed the incorporation of traditional healing approaches into select US Indian Health Service (IHS) service units, the employment of physicians by Native healing centers, and efforts to integrate traditional and Western approaches to healing in the care of AI/ANs.
... and they work!

- More than two thirds of the urban AI/ANs in the present study used traditional health practices, and more than half felt that this use resulted in a significant improvement in their health.

- 11 RCTs of stress management showed significant increase in the quality of life of PLWHA. And there is some evidence that “complimentary medicine” can be used in an integrated approach to HIV/AIDS treatment, particularly in maximizing the quality of life of HIV-positive individuals.
How are Fighting Disease Today

- Traditional Healers
  - Referrals
- Holistic Approaches
  - Mental, Physical, Emotional, Spiritual
- Gardens
- Food
- Medicine
  - Herbs and plants
- Ceremonies
- Housing
  - For Native clients
  - Traditional structures
- Music
  - Lively events
- Language
  - Traditional terminology
- Celebration of Life
  - Rather than condemning disease
Organizations that use traditional healing in treatment and care

• Examples from Indian Country, Alaska & Hawaii
• Varying degrees
  • From organizations referring out to traditional healers to entire housing units that incorporate many different practices
  • Organizations that incorporate policies that encourage and give allowances for employees’ traditional practices
LAKOTA CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE
HIV Patients

- Mitakuye Oyasin
  - We are all related
- Iyepi kuja ca wookiye wacin
  - They are ill and need help
- Oki’zi ya ki le, toweni sni waste na sica cantognaka na yuonihan he cetu
  - Healing is never about good or bad only about positive and respect
- Wici’kuje le ohute yuha, ca iyewayaw he’ hanl wozanni na woo’kiye econpica uwo
  - This sickness has a has root so find it then health and help can come
Depression Form HIV Illness

Canti’ hanke
Traditional Counseling

• Lako wico han wowanonspe
  – Traditional counseling today
  – Usually you find a way to communicate with a healer or half-side and then explain what you need help with.
  – From there, relationship is established with a sacred herb like tobacco this ensures the trust develops a relationship that is thought of like family.
- Wicokuje: Disease
- Mni watu: Antibody
- Wayazan: Effected by disease
- Ecunsni: Does not function
- Slolyasni: Unknown
- Awa’pe: Hope
- Wakan wicoh’anpi: Ceremonial
Okihi Wacin: Individual Seeking Help for the Benefit/Healing of the Self

- Kahtaka: Harmful attempts are made upon a person
- Kahtaka: when a person violates the principle of health and wellbeing one is affected
Ceremonial Approach

- **Wayazan**: A person affected.
- **Wayazanka**: Person is showing overt signs.
- **Gleya Ca**: person is severely affected.
- **Gleya Kiya**: Person runs out of his own options.
Ceremonial Approach

• Tawacin yugan
  – Thinking will begin to form

• Le wicasa/wiyan ca unkiktapi na waste wanyanka, na wopilaku ekiya, slolyepi can a wokahnigapi iyacu
  – The person is awakened to the value of the self and the options for cure and the knowledge and understanding.

• Owale tonwewayaya
  – The person begins to seek some help.

• Wookiye okuwa ob wicalapica na wowicala
  – The Person will pursue help according to his belief and faith.
Ceremonial Approach

- Cannumpa Wi coh’an: The Person will have Pipe Ceremony
- Inipi: First Purification Lodge (Sweat)
- Waunyanpi Walanka: Second the Altar is displayed
- Lowanpi: Third is Singing Ceremony
Ceremonial Approach

• Kiglapi
  – The Cannumpa Ceremony is done

• Wozanni na wookiye icu
  – The person will recover/get better

• Wakan Tanka nici un go with Creator:
  – Most individuals stop out here with the belief that the person is completely healed
Ceremonial Approach

• Onspekiya Waku: Give instructions
• Maintain strict self-care for four days after the Ceremony is completed.
• Self Care is a new change for the rest of your life
All is in Beauty Again

• Yuwakan lecetu iglutan
  – Have the blessing way completed after the Healing Ceremony

• Wicohan na wokiziya ligulstan wozanni na wookiye kicuya
  – The Ceremonies and Healing are completed to restore Harmony and Balance
Benefits
Patients/Clients

- Healing
- Spirituality
- Balance
- Native Family and Community
  - Acceptance
  - Support

“Clients bounce back from being really sick to being out and mobile and even feeling much better in a couple of weeks of seeking traditional services.”
“It really helped me to be able to accept this was something that was going to be part of my journey. I was able to deal with it. I was taught to deal with it with grace and gratitude. To live with beauty.”
Benefits

• Community
  • Supports community healing
  • Promotes acceptance
  • Revitalizes traditional practices

• Agency
  • Culturally effective
  • Improve relationship with clients
Bridging the Traditional with the Contemporary
“The best way would be for a traditional healer and the [Western] doctor to work on the patient together. Everyone involved would benefit.”
Challenges

- Buy-in
- Funding use
- Funding Sources
  - “Evidence Based” models
  - Research
  - Data
- Stigma
- Opposing guidance
Respect
Exploitation

• Removing the act from the original meaning and purpose
  • Non-Natives
  • For Profit
  • Changing practices
  • Using without giving credit

• Native spirituality, healing, and way of life is as sacred as any other religion
“Sweat Lodge” Deaths
What Can You Do?

• Does your clinic serve a large Native population?
• Does this Native population practice traditional healing?
• Would it benefit your clients to offer traditional healing/practices?
Recommendations

Key Considerations:

- Make sure your staff are culturally competent especially in their own/their community’s tribal heritage.
- Meet the clients where they are at and encourage them to use whatever is their traditional background.
- Ask for guidance— from clients, from community, from agency, from the Creator, from God.
- Assess your community and ensure practices fit your community’s needs.
- Make sure clients know what it is they are being asked to do.
- Seek support from community members, tribal members, agency, and funders.
• Module 6: Integrative Medicine - Incorporating Traditional Healers into Public Health Delivery- Introduction to Traditional Medicine: http://www.uniteforsight.org/effective-program-development/module6
Ahe’hee

Hannabah Blue
hannabah.blue@gmail.com

Robert Cross
titinwan@netzero.com