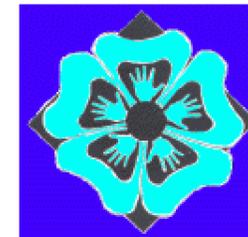


Do you think we met that goal? Evaluating Hopeful Connections Cancer Support Group for Alaska Native Survivors

Ashley E. Strauch, Ellen D. S. Lopez, Freda M. Williams



Partnership

This evaluation was conducted within a partnership between the Fairbanks Native Association (FNA) & the UAF Center for Alaska Native Health Research (CANHR)



Rationale & Introduction

Cancer is the leading cause of death among Alaska Natives.¹ When compared with other groups, disparities exist. Alaska Native people are less likely to survive 5 years beyond initial cancer diagnosis.²

Due to improved early detection screening & advances in treatment, the number of cancer survivors is rising.³ Yet, little is known how Alaska Native people experience cancer & cancer survivorship.

Formative interviews conducted with 28 Alaska Native cancer survivors revealed the need for a culturally responsive cancer support group.⁴

In response, the FNA/CANHR collaboratively founded Hopeful Connections. With funding from:

- Doyon, Ltd
- The Institute of Translational Health Sciences
- Native People for Cancer Control

After offering 8 bi-monthly sessions, Hopeful Connections conducted a qualitative evaluation

- Funded by UAF-URSA

Hopeful Connections

Hopeful Connections is a cancer support group for Alaska Native cancer survivors & their loved ones. It is offered through our FNA/CANHR collaborative

Goals of Hopeful Connections are to enhance:

- 1.Safety:** for sharing & caring
- 2.Sharing:** evidence-based & personal information
- 3.Trust:** in cancer/health-related research
- 4.Awareness:** about the strengths & needs of Alaska Native cancer survivors

- What is cancer?
- Cancer Nutrition
- Telling our stories
- Photovoice
- Cancer caregivers
- Early detection
- Cancer Treatments

Methods/Procedures

Ethics

- All materials & procedures were approved by FNA, & the UAF-Institutional Review Board
- Participants provided informed consent
- *Participants were offered:*
 - \$30 gift card for completing an interview
 - \$30 for taking part in an interactive findings forum

Recruitment & Processes

- Participants were recruited via colorful flyers & Word of Mouth
- Interviews were digitally audio-recorded
- 15 Support group members participated (11 women, 4 men)

Data Analysis & Verification

- Interviews lasted 35-120 minutes
- Recordings were professionally transcribed verbatim
- Transcripts were coded (question by question) by 2 researchers using Content Analysis
- The qualitative management package, NVivo 9, enabled conclusions to be drawn across questions & participants

Findings were shared with participants during a Findings Forum offered as a Hopeful Connections Support Session

Interview questions pertained to participants':

- Expectations of support group
- Importance placed on FNA involvement
- Likes/dislikes of support group
- Opinions of support group procedures
- Satisfaction with sessions/topics covered
- Assessment of cultural appropriateness
- Comfort with group composition (ages, types of cancer, genders)
- Interest in expanding supportive reach
- **Assessment of goal achievement**



Findings (regarding goal achievement)

Goal 1: Safety for sharing & caring

- Achieved? Yes (15/15 said 'yes')

"Just to get where we're at with this support group I think was a big move for all of us - because it opened a door to a new way of thinking towards helping each other"



Goal 2: Sharing Factual Information

- Achieved? Yes (15/15 said 'yes')
- Suggested need for more handouts & speakers

"The few speakers that we had they were very positive and helpful in a way, but that goes back out into the community"



Goal 4: Trust in research

- Achieved? Almost. (12/15 said 'yes') Most, but not, all, agreed that goal has been achieved.
- Participants indicated reservation about research based on past negative experiences



"I personally would like to be part of that research team because I feel like too many times people from the outside world come into our villages & do some kind of study"

Goal 4: Awareness of survivor strengths & needs

- Achieved? Almost. (12/15 said 'yes')

Suggestions for improvement:

- Become more involved in Fairbanks community, talk with legislators, extend program to rural communities



"I think we're just starting..."

Discussion & Implications

This evaluation assessed Hopeful Connections' achievement of 4 goals

- Interview participants agreed that the Hopeful Connections is offering a safe environment for sharing & caring, and disseminating factual information
- Participants, nevertheless, indicated a need to improve efforts to enhance trust in research & awareness raising about Alaska Native cancer survivorship
- Providing factual information & enhancing trust in research by offering "Cancer 101," a multi-session training that provides evidence-based information about:
 - Cancer Basics, Cancer Prevention & Early Detection, Bio-speciman Banking, & Cancer Coping
- Raising awareness about Alaska Native survivors by joining the Fairbanks (American Cancer Society's) Relay for Life by:
 - Establishing a Hopeful Connections Relay team
 - Creating Athabascan beaded pins to give and welcome all Relay for Life participants

- Raising awareness & providing information by administrating a Hopeful Connections Facebook page
- Planning to raise awareness by offering a toll-free call-in number during support group sessions
- Planning to become a 501©3 to expand supportive reach & achieve goals throughout



Cited References

1. Frieberg & Melbey, 2008
2. Lanier, et al., 2006
3. American Cancer Society, 2011
4. Lopez, et al., 2013

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- For more information, please contact:**
• Ashley Strauch: aestrauch@alaska.edu