

Nursing Leadership in Native American Health

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Nursing leadership is vital to changing the landscape of healthcare delivery to the Native American populations in the western United States. Through leadership and collaboration, this DNP project will continue to build relationships and influence change to improve the lives and health of Native Americans.



Background

Native American populations are plagued with health disparities. The Pine Ridge Reservation, situated in the southwest corner of South Dakota, is noted to be one of the poorest counties in the country. Statistics about the health of Pine Ridge residents provided by The American Indian Humanitarian Foundation (“AIHF”) indicate that 97% of residents living on the Reservation live below the poverty line with an average household per capita income of less than \$6,000. There is an 85% or higher unemployment rate (AIHF, 2015). The average life expectancy on the reservation is between 45 and 48 years of age. Health statistics reported by AIHF include diabetes rates of 800 times the national average, infant mortality 300%-500% higher than the national average, teen suicide 150% higher than the national average, and tuberculosis at 800% higher than the national average.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork at the clinic included direct patient care, observation and discussion with clinic staff and Native American patients. Knowledge that was brought to this experience included cardiothoracic patient care, emergency room care, and case management. Patients of the clinic can make appointments to be seen or can show up and request to be seen. There is no triage system in place, making prioritization of patients and protection of staff difficult. Many patients travel long distances to be seen at the clinic. Patients are seen for everything from well visits/physical exams, follow up for chronic conditions, sick visits and diagnosis of new conditions.

Future

At this time, a relationship has been established with a second group providing care on a reservation close to Pine Ridge. This group travels to Cheyenne River Reservation, also in South Dakota. The care provided by this group focuses on health education as opposed to direct hands on care. The role of nursing, nursing leadership and this DNP project will be to address two areas of healthcare and the barriers to healthcare on the Cheyenne River and Pine Ridge Reservations.

References

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