

A THOUGHTFUL AND COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO HEPATITIS B IS ESSENTIAL WHEN WORKING IN REMOTE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

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Background/Approach:

Hepatitis B can be a difficult topic to discuss in remote Aboriginal communities given the misunderstandings of the transmission; stigma, shame and paucity of knowledge surrounding hepatitis B. Taking a thoughtful and collaborative approach by respecting cultural differences and enabling equal partnerships of western and Aboriginal worldviews ensures greater success of our hepatitis B program.

Analysis/Argument:

Hepatitis B is common in many Aboriginal communities but is still much stigmatised and poorly understood. Systems both for research and day to day processes of life such as accessing Centrelink and healthcare are modelled on western world views. When working with Aboriginal communities we are working alongside Aboriginal systems and worldview that have been established over 50,000 years. We realised early in the development of the Menzies hepatitis B program the necessity of compromise within both systems to ensure success. Our goals are shared and to enable us to achieve these we need to have equitable input from both worldviews into all aspects of partnerships.

Outcome/Results:

Aboriginal Community Based Researchers and Health Practitioners are an integral part of the team, not only to undertake the research and health care delivery but to also take part in the planning and implementation of both. Acknowledging Aboriginal Community Based Researchers and Health Practitioners are the experts when it comes to local knowledge is crucial.

Conclusions/Applications:

When undertaking such a delicate topic great care must be taken to look after the relationships developed during the process. Trust is one of the major areas that can make the difference between a successful program and a failure. To accept it takes time to build the relationships with the communities and participants is essential. Be prepared to alter the approach taken to any particular study to take into consideration the differences in cultural ways between different communities.

Disclosure of Interest Statement (example):

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