Improving Access to Cancer Treatment and Screening

The Indigenous Women’s Cancer Support Group (IWCSG), Geraldton

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• **Background to Research**
  
  • Higher mortality and morbidity rates for cancer with Indigenous people
  
  • Less access to early detection and medical intervention treatment
  
  • Barriers: communication difficulties and cultural alienation
• IWCSG History

• **Aim:** To support Indigenous women with cancer, as well as carers and relatives

• **Initiative:** developed between:
  - ATSI Health Promotion Scholarship recipient, now IWCSG Coordinator Annette Pepper, *supported by Curtin University and the Combined Universities Centre for Rural Health*
  - Allied Health within WA Country Health Services, Geraldton Regional Hospital

• **Funding:** 0.2 FTE for coordinator
• IWCSG Research Project

• **Aim:** To describe IWCSG operations and investigate the group’s effectiveness

• **Qualitative research design:**

• Observation of group

• In-depth interviews:
  • 11 Geraldton-based health service providers
  • IWCSG Coordinator
  • 10 women linked to IWCSG support
• Preliminary Findings

• **Group operations**
  - Meets fortnightly
  - Share and care opportunity
  - Education
  - ‘Bush telegraph’: Organic support grapevine
  - Collaborative partnerships
  - Referrals from health service providers
  - Group promotion
• **Group Effectiveness**

  - **Unanimous support:** by health service providers
  - **Bridge:** to access cancer treatment
  - **Education** to increase understanding of cancer and treatment
  - **Cultural appropriateness and role:** to increase understanding of need for cancer treatment/screening
  - **Overcoming cultural barriers:** Shyness, shame, fear, need for privacy
• Group Benefits

  • **Emotional support:** network of care and encouragement, safety and trust
  • **Practical assistance:** cleaning, child care, shopping
  • **Feeling useful:** sharing cancer story
  • **The ‘heart’ as group driver:** traditional caring role of Aboriginal women
• Future: Developing Partnerships

• Facilitating collaborative working interface
  • Health service providers: Formalization of IWCSG via clearly defined goals, terms of reference, policy guidelines
  • IWCSG: Holistic, organic, grass-roots energy

• Appropriate funding
  • Full-time Coordinator
  • Premises and resources
• Summary

• Preliminary findings

• IWCSG a vital bridge to cancer treatment
  • Essential cultural role
  • Important support role, emotional and practical

• Development of collaborative partnerships

• IWCSG as a potential model