

“A HEALING FEELING”: FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS AMONG RURAL AFRICAN AMERICANS WITH DIABETES

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Purpose. Examine whether previously described barriers to diabetes care for African Americans (AA) capture the experience of AA participants with diabetes living in rural areas. Describe the participants' view of specific factors that enhance and inhibit engaging in self-management associated with optimal diabetes management.

Method. This descriptive, exploratory study used qualitative methods in a team approach. Separate male and female focus groups were conducted in two rural Virginia communities in Fall 2003 and Summer 2004 to answer the following research questions: *What is the experience of self-management of adult AA's with type 2 diabetes living in rural Virginia? What factors are described by informants that enhance and inhibit diabetes self-management? What similarities/differences exist between male and female participants? What are the characteristics of health care currently received by participants? What recommendations do informants offer for designing a diabetes care program that addresses their experience of self-management?* Recruitment was conducted through the following methods: local newspaper/radio advertisements, gender-specific flyers with stamped postcards, pulpit announcements in community Black churches, and through the Alliance of Black Churches. Interested participants were screened by phone by study team members. African American study team members served as focus group leaders and were gender-matched to the participant groups. Groups were conducted in an accessible community location.

Findings. Focus group sessions were audio taped and transcribed; preliminary findings are based on 4 focus groups with 32 participants from the first community (17 females; 15 males). All sessions were observed and recorded by at least 2 members of the study team, allowing comparison of field notes about sessions' overall atmosphere and any themes noted. Transcripts were first read in entirety for initial themes and subjected to textual line-by-line analysis with the goal of revealing and refining themes. Initial findings include: participants commonly used metaphoric and/or symbolic language (often religious) in expressing diabetes-related issues; men and women discussed and emphasized some symptoms and problems differently, and described “ideal” diabetes programs differently; both men's and women's groups perceived the focus groups as an intervention (even though researchers believed it was only ‘descriptive research’). Subsequent data from the second community will be analyzed in the same manner to further examine and compare experiences in the two communities.

Discussion. Cultural issues appear to exist in discussions surrounding diabetes. Men and women describe symptom experiences and perceived needs related to diabetes differently. Opportunities to describe experiences are highly valued by participants.