Exploring Health, Diet and Diabetes in the Boston Haitian Community

Abstract

Type 2 diabetes is now one of the most common conditions amongst Americans of all ages and the most prevalent type of diabetes. Despite the possibility of prevention, physicians diagnose a number of people with diabetes each year, notably 1.6 million people age 20 and older in 2007, the most recent year for which national data on diabetes is available (National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse (NDIC), 2007). While diabetes is prevalent in the African American community, there exists a noted occurrence among Haitians including immigrants to the United States that has been less explored (NDIC, 2007; Anderson & Christison-Lagay, 2008; Jean-Baptiste, 2006). This study focuses on the incidence of diabetes within the Boston Haitian community and particularly explores existing efforts to educate and treat Haitian diabetics and expand diabetes awareness with the goal of increased prevention within the community. Methods of research included: interviews with Haitian diabetic patients, observations of multiple sessions of a group treatment program, two visits to a Haitian radio station in Boston and interviews and observations with food service providers in the Boston area. To supplement this information, researchers were instructed in beginner’s level Haitian Creole and curriculum on Haitian culture.

In addition to presenting the findings of these observations and interviews, this study intends to offer suggestions for future research in the context of diabetes education, treatment, management and prevention within the Haitian population. While current structures in biomedicine, food service, and media have made great strides toward improving culturally competent care and creating environments conducive to diabetes management and awareness, great potential exists to improve diabetes treatment and education for the Haitian population and
similar ethnic groups. This study serves to spark that dialogue within biomedical arenas, community institutions and forums and amongst the Haitian population, particularly those in Boston. With the results of this study, researchers can further explore areas—mental and emotional health, group treatment, religion, spirituality and health in relation to diabetes—that will supplement the preliminary observations and assessments of this study, thus providing a stronger foundation from which to move forward in improving culturally-specific and competent care for Haitian diabetics.