American Indian & Alaska Native Behavioral Health Webinar Series

The Utilization of Traditional Based Practices for American Indians/Alaska Natives with Substance Use Disorders: Research and Treatment Implications

June 5, 2013
Presented by:
Dan Dickerson, DO, MPH

Upcoming Webinars from the National American Indian Alaska Native ATTC

Behavioral Health Webinar Series
July 3, 2013
Harm Reduction Coalition Development: How Tribes Can Develop their own Coalitions in their Communities
Presented by: White Earth Nation Harm Reduction Coalition
August 7, 2013
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Presented by: Harold Tarbell

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For more information on the ATTC Network, visit: www.attnetwork.org
**Today’s Speaker:**

Daniel Dickerson, D.O., M.P.H.

Daniel Dickerson, D.O., M.P.H., Inupiaq, is a double board-certified psychiatrist and addiction psychiatrist and is Assistant Research Psychiatrist at UCLA, Integrated Substance Abuse Programs (ISAP). He also provides psychiatric and substance abuse treatment services at United American Indian Involvement (UAII) in Los Angeles. He focuses his research on substance abuse among American Indians/Alaska Natives and on the development of culturally relevant substance abuse treatments for American Indians/Alaska Natives. He is the Principal Investigator on an R21 National Institutes of Health (NIMH)/National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine-funded research grant which focuses on the development and initial evaluation of “Drum-Assisted Recovery Therapy for Native Americans (DARTNA).” This study is the first NIH-funded research study studying the potential benefits of drumming for American Indians/Alaska Natives with substance use disorders. Dr. Dickerson is also an Advisory Council member of the Native American ATTC.

**Background:**

American Indians/Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) and Drug/Alcohol Abuse

- Rates of past month binge alcohol use and illicit drug use for adults were higher among AI/ANs than the U.S. national averages (30.6 vs. 24.5 percent and 11.2 vs. 7.9 percent, respectively) although the rate of past month alcohol use for adults was lower among AI/AN than the national average (43.9 vs. 55.2 percent) (SAMHSA, 2010).

- Based on combined data from 2003 to 2011, Al/A/ANs were more likely than individuals from other racial/ethnic groups to have needed substance abuse treatment in the past year (SAMHSA, 2012).
American Indians/Alaska Natives and Mental Health Problems

- AI/ANs experience high rates of traumatic exposure, abuse, domestic violence, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder.
- AI/ANs have very high rates of suicide compared to other ethnic/racial groups in the U.S.
- Comorbidity of mental health issues and substance abuse among AI/ANs are common.
- New culturally-relevant treatment strategies to decreasing the burden substance abuse and mental health problems are in critical need since the trends have not changed.

AI/AN and cultural identity

- Many American Indians strongly believe that their problems with alcohol stem from their sudden disconnection with traditional American Indian culture.
- American Indian traditions, customs, rituals, and values may assist in discovering positive coping strategies during recovery.
- Denying AI/ANs the opportunity to rely on those strategies may contribute to ongoing drug/alcohol use.

Historical Trauma and AI/AN Cultural Identity

- Many U.S. historical actions, i.e., removals and relocation acts, have resulted in a fragmented AI/AN community.
- Many AI/ANs may have "lost" some of their cultural identity.
- Lost of cultural identity may contribute to increased drug and alcohol use.
- Conversely, strong cultural identification may help youth and adults be less likely to use drugs/alcohol.
- AI adolescents who identify with Indian culture may be less likely to be involved in alcohol use than those who lack this sense of identity.

Incorporation of traditional healing services

- Incorporating traditional aspects of healing has been recognized as being important in substance abuse recovery for AI/AN.
- Participating in traditional activities may enhance and renew AI/AN sense of personal and cultural identity.
- Studies have shown a renewed pride in AI/AN cultural heritage, feeling motivated to learn more about their cultural heritage, and coming to feel “worthy” of participating cultural events among AI/ANs in recovery.
- Opportunity to learn about healthier cultural ideals, views, and traditions which may aid in recovery.

Traditional Healing Services

- Highly sought and requested by both rural and urban AI/AN
- Include a wide range of services and activities
- Spirituality is an important of Native way of life-everything is connected-body, mind, spirit.
- Living in balance is essential-harmony and balance through traditional prayer, songs, ceremonies.
- Integrated services may improve substance abuse treatment outcomes.

Cultural activities used in substance abuse programs for AI/ANs

- Ceremonies and Rituals
  - Participating in sweat lodge ceremonies.
  - Smudging.
  - Attending social dances.
  - Attending a Sundance.
  - Fasting.
  - Going on a vision quest.
  - Paying attention to dreams.
  - Attending powwows and other sober community activities.
  - Storytelling and listening to stories.
  - Participating in a Talking Circle.
- Tribal Crafts
  - Making traditional attire for powwows and other ceremonies.
  - Tanning hides.
  - Making ribbon shirts.
  - Sewing quilts.
  - Learning the native language.
  - Cooking traditional foods.
  - Picking and drying herbs.
  - Making jewelry and moccasins.
  - Making cradle boards.
Some commonly used traditional-based treatments used for substance abuse treatment across the U.S.

- Sweat Lodge
- Talking Circle
- Medicine Wheel and 12 Steps by White Bison, Inc.

**Sweat Lodge Ceremony**

- Widely utilized throughout AI communities.
- Used for many centuries.
- Purification ceremony.
- Use of drumming, talking circle within.
- Research on the Sweat Lodge ceremony controversial

**Talking Circle**

- Non-competitive, traditional-based way of communicating in a group format.
- Use of sage, talking stick, etc.
- Used throughout many AI/AN substance abuse treatment centers.
- Research thus far is very limited.

**Medicine Wheel and 12 Steps**

- Developed by Don Coyhis and the White Bison, Inc.
- Utilizes the fundamental philosophies and practices of the Twelve Step process.
- The 12-steps are organized within the conceptual framework of the Medicine Wheel.
- Widely utilized throughout AI/AN clinics. However, formal integration often does not occur.

**The potential value of researching AI/AN traditional-based practices**

- Add “validity” to currently utilized community-based practices.
- Add to the literature with regard to the benefits of traditional based practices.
- Provide AI/ANs with more culturally-relevant and acceptable treatments.
- Decrease overall substance abuse rates among AI/ANs

**Drum-Assisted Recovery Therapy for Native Americans (DARTNA)**

- Study overview: Daniel Dickerson, D.O., M.P.H.
- Principal Investigator
- R-21 grant
- Funded by NIH/NCCAM
Questions relating to drumming and AI/ANs

- Can the use of the drum be used in a culturally-appropriate manner for substance abuse tx?
- How important culturally is it to accompany singing with drumming?
- Roles of AI/AN females in drumming?
- Approaching diversity of AI/AN drumming traditions (562 federally-recognized tribes)

Historical Perspective of Drumming

Drumming and its cultural significance

- May offer a connection with the spirit world, ancestors, AI/AN culture, and identity.
- Many view their drum as a relative, signified by terms within tribal languages that refer to drums as “grandfather.”
- Drums are used in nearly every aspect of Native culture, from births to funerals.
- Every tribe has their own sets of rules when it comes to how the materials for drums are gathered, who has the right to prepare a drum, and what types of behavior are allowed near a drum.

American Indians/Alaska Natives and Drumming

- The drum is a sacred instrument within AI/AN cultures.
- The drumbeat symbolizes heartbeat of Mother Earth, the heartbeat of Indigenous Nations.
- Used in ceremonies, social dances, feasts, in preparation for hunting.
- It was and still is used to help heal the sick and as a way of carrying songs and prayers.
- A way of bringing people together.

Drumming and Alaska Natives

- The drum, called the suayaq or kilaun, has a driftwood frame which is steamed and bent into an oval shape, then covered with a stretched walrus stomach, whale liver lining, or scraped caribou hide.
- The oral history of Inupiaq has survived in songs, drumming, and stories passed on from one generation to the next.
- The Inupiaq Shaman’s use of the drum in ceremonies and to communicate with spirits disturbed missionaries and was subsequently forbidden.

“The drum connected me with something I hadn’t known before, and I felt a huge lump in my throat that was equal parts sorrow, gratitude and joy. When I was coaxed out for my first intertribal dance, I closed my eyes and felt the drum and began to move my feet. It was magic, I could dance. It would be a few years before I was graced with the drum teachings of my people, but there was a spiritual connection nonetheless. Once I felt the drum in my chest, the hollowness I’d carried as a displaced Indian kid was gone. In its place was belonging.”

Therapeutic effects of drumming

- Several studies have demonstrated physical and psychological effects associated with drumming (Winkelman, 2003).
- Drumming may also have biological effects that may mitigate various behaviors.
- Rhythmic auditory stimuli (including drumming, singing, and chanting) may generate auditory drive leading to increased alpha and theta wave production, which may contribute to a desired meditative state (Wright, 1991; Maxfield, 1991; Winkelman, 2000; Mandell, 1980).
- This response is produced by activation of the limbic brain's serotonergic circuits to the lower brain. These slow-wave discharges produce strongly coherent brain-wave patterns that synchronize the frontal areas of the brain with ascending discharges, integrating nonverbal information from lower brain structures into the frontal cortex and producing insight.

Electroencephalography (EEG): Brain Wave Activity

Questions relating to drumming and AI/ANs

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Drum-Assisted Recovery Therapy for Native Americans (DARTNA)

- Daniel Dickerson, D.O., M.P.H. and Anthony Robichaud developed an substance abuse treatment protocol utilizing drumming for AIs/ANs with substance abuse problems.
- R-21 NIH/NCCAM grant awarded Sept/2010 to complete the development and pilot-test a new drum therapy treatment program for AIs/ANs with substance use disorders.

DARTNA Treatment Protocol

- Initially proposed to be 3 days/wk x 12/wks (changed to 2 days/wk as recommended through focus groups)
- Each day consists of a 3-hour treatment format.
- Each wk focusing sequentially on the 12-steps of AA/NA and concepts of the Northern Plains Medicine Wheel
Daily treatment structure (Monday and Friday)

- **Hour 1:** Education/Cultural Discussion: drumming, teaching of songs, Native American Medicine Wheel, 12-steps, White Bison concepts
- **Hour 2:** Drumming Activities Corresponding to Medicine Wheel and Concepts
- **Hour 3:** Talking Circle/Processing Group

Primary Grant Activities

- Series of focus groups (treatment providers, patients, CAB) to discuss initial treatment format
- Pretest of DARTNA among 10 AI/ANs
- Follow-up focus group to finalize protocol.
- Manual Development.

Initial Focus Groups

- Focus groups conducted among
  1) AI/AN substance abuse providers (n=9),
  2) AI/ANs with substance abuse hx. (n=9)
  3) Community Advisory Board (n=4)
- Purpose to obtain feedback with regard to the preliminary DARTNA treatment protocol.
- Feedback received to be used for a follow-up pretest of DARTNA

DARTNA focus group overarching conceptual themes

- (1) drumming can be especially beneficial for AI/ANs with substance abuse issues
- (2) assuring a culturally-based focus is necessary as it relates to drumming for AI/ANs with substance abuse issues
- (3) providing a treatment format which will provide a foundation of cultural ideals which cross the landscape of diverse tribes while recognizing tribal diversity is necessary
- (4) addressing gender roles as it relates to drumming activities must be addressed within the treatment setting.

Focus group: Community Advisory Board (CAB) member quote

“You want to teach definitely the significance of drumming and Native people feel the drumming is sacred. It’s the heartbeat of the earth and mother earth. The target is also educating and hands on experience and to have your own creativity to you making the drum and on top of that teaching how to create the drum.”
CAB and cultural identity

“So we know there is a relationship with someone’s cultural identity and their substance use or other behavior problems. So there is already that relationship. So by being more connected to the culture is really going to help them whether they’ve drummed before or whether they’ve ever had any knowledge about their tribal culture. I think it’s their first step that will really help.”

Substance abuse patient quote:

“The urban Indians are really Natives not learned in their cultures and where they are. This is important to know for their part of the nation. Urban Indians need teachings also as well as the people from the reservation. The people from the reservations are no different than urban Indians because on the reservation, we abused all the other drugs and that’s what strays us away from our culture.”

After treatment quote (CAB)

“The tools that they use in treatment should be implemented in their lives. It’s up to them to continue to go to Pow Wows or to sweat…to cultivate it in their lives and for drumming to be a part of their lives. It will be the responsibility of the service providers to create opportunities for the clients after their participation in treatment.”

Pretest of DARTNA

- 10 AI/ANs with current substance use disorders (5 males, 5 females) were provided the preliminary treatment protocol.
- Follow-up focus groups among participants, providers and CAB were conducted to aid in the development of the final treatment protocol.

DARTNA pretest participants

- The age range was 19-67 years of age.
- Six participants were male and 5 were female.
- Education level ranged from 10th grade to Masters Degree.
- Nine participants reported alcohol as being their drug of choice and 2 participants reported marijuana as their drug of choice. With regard to marital status, six were divorced, four were single, and one was married.
- With regard to employment, seven were employed (either full time or part time), three were unemployed, and one was on disability.
Preliminary DARTNA Pretest Findings

- Promising results suggest benefits of drumming in the following areas:
  - decreased depression/anxiety
  - decreased fatigue
  - enhanced spirituality

Feedback from participants after participating in DARTNA

- "I’m grateful it’s my time to reconnect with the cultural, traditional way of life to find out who I really am and where I come from."
- "With constant distraction in my path, drumming is a way to look up from stress, take care of things, get them out of the way."

Participant feedback continued:

- "I feel serenity, peace…"
- "It’s uplifting and the drum itself is spiritual. I never thought of doing drugs or drinking."
  "(I) start to feel spiritual connection. This is where I need to be, where I should be. I feel at home…"

Barriers to conducting research investigating traditional-based treatments.

- Unethical research having been conducted in the past on AI/ANs.
- Stigma of research in AI/AN communities.
- Concerns of being “experimented on”
- Shortage of “research shops”/established research centers specifically for AI/AN studies within communities.
- Ethical considerations doing clinical trials in AI/AN communities-concerns ½ of the sample would not receive the “promising intervention.”

Possible approaches to conduct research analyzing traditional based treatments.

- Utilize Community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach
- Starting slow and purposeful with qualitative research first to gain community perspectives.
- Education with regard to the value of research must be provided AI/AN communities throughout the U.S.
- Recognition that traditional based treatments are sacred need to be fully appreciated by researchers.
Possible approaches to researching traditional based treatments.

- Some traditional-based activities may not be “researchable” as voted on by some AI/AN communities.

- Further discussions with NIH to discuss challenging scenarios including possibly allowing for smaller sample sizes, innovative/mixture of research methods and approaches to be allowed.

- Need for grants to allow for research capacity building.

Additional Recommendations

- Allow for some community-defined practices to be considered beneficial substance abuse treatments within the scientific community.

- A significant need for educating NIH research reviewers on AI/AN traditional based practices.

- A need for more special issue medical journals on this topic, more literature needed on all aspects of traditional based practices.

Contact Info

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Questions and Discussion

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Presented by: Bob Rohret, MPH, IADC

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