

Hispanic Farmworkers Experience Diabetes As a Condition Effecting All Aspects of Life

Heuer L, Lausch C. Living with Diabetes: Perceptions of Hispanic Migrant Farmworkers. *Journal of Community Health Nursing* 23(1):49-64, 2006.

The prevalence of diabetes among the Hispanic population in the United States is significantly higher than in the general US population. For example, the rate for Hispanic American adults is twice that of non-Hispanic white adults. As the Hispanic population continues to grow, managing this and other chronic health problems poses a significant challenge to health care providers. In order to address this epidemic, a recent study (Heuer & Lausch 2006) took an in-depth look at the perceptions and beliefs of Hispanic migrant workers about living with diabetes and compared them with the model that is taught in medical school and held by most health care providers. The goal of the study was to assist providers in adapting their health education techniques to better meet their patients' needs.

This study used an explanatory models approach, in which participants are asked to describe in their own words their understanding of the etiology, symptoms, treatment, and illness course, as well as their experience with the disease. The overarching difference between the model of diabetes as described by the farmworkers and that generally held by health care providers was that, for the farmworkers, a diagnosis of diabetes effected all aspects of their lives: physical, psychological, social, and emotional. They described the disease in terms of the symptoms and their effect on their work, family, mental health, and daily life rather than regarding it as a physical illness that affects primarily their health status. Because the participants all had family members with diabetes, they tended to view it as inevitable and ordinary, though problematic. It was not viewed as preventable, although participants did acknowledge that diet was involved in its onset. They were very concerned about the possible complications such as blindness, amputation, and kidney disease. Most significant for management purposes was that the participants viewed diabetes as an acute illness, believing that if they followed the doctor's orders, it would be cured. This belief could potentially inhibit the adoption of the lifestyle changes needed to control this chronic condition over time.

To better target education efforts and formulate treatment plans, clinicians should take into account their patients' beliefs concerning diabetes. In so doing, clinicians will be able to communicate more clearly the importance of following the treatment program consistently, and throughout the rest of the patients' lives.

From *Farmworker Justice's EyeOpener*, an electronic newsletter covering important recent developments in research and regulation on issues affecting the health and safety of migrant farmworkers. It is a joint project of Farmworker Justice and the Migrant Clinicians Network, supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration's Bureau of Primary Health Care.
