Tribal Community and Clinical Linkages

The primary goal of health organizations is to increase the health and wellbeing of their community. Accomplishing this goal becomes easier when health care providers, community organizations, and the community are connected. This is why Tribal organizations like National Native Network and California Rural Indian Health Board inspire to increase community and clinical linkages between Tribes and Tribal health clinics.

Connections between patients, families, caregivers, Tribal health care providers, health care systems, public health organizations, and other community resources are known as Tribal community and clinical linkages. Providing quality healthcare requires a diverse team of health professionals with a mission to coordinate services that increase access to community wellness programs and preventive services. Bringing together a multitude of stakeholders and different perspectives allows the community to have access to multiple ways of addressing health issues and finding healing. It is crucial that Tribal clinics incorporate traditional practices and wisdom to their wellness programs or collaborate with other community organizations that offer such services.

Community and clinical linkages increase access to valuable resources which enhances the lives of all members of the community and leads to patients receiving holistic healthcare. One remarkable example of a Tribal community and clinical linkages is Greenville Rancheria Tribal Health Program (GRTHP). GRTHP’s physicians, dentists, nurses, community health representatives (CHR), and other clinicians work together as a team to better the lives of their community. I experienced this cohesiveness firsthand during multiple encounters with their staff, clinicians, and their executive director. One aspect that stood out the most at GRTHP was the integration between different departments. After assessing a patient, clinicians make a direct referral to their wellness programs such as the Second Wind Smoking Cessation, Living Well, Diabetes Talking Circle, Chronic Disease Self-Management, CHR home visits, Dental Department, and the 1-800-NO-BUTTS California Smokers Helpline. The linkages do not stop there. To support their community, GRTHP has also networked with Tehama County Drug & Alcohol-Perinatal Program and the County’s Tobacco Coalition. By leveraging resources and identifying expertise in the community, GRTHP sets an example of holistic healthcare for other Tribal clinics. Partnering with Magazines like “Enjoy-Northern California Living” shows the resourcefulness of GRTHP. Their June 2017 edition educated the community about the harms of commercial tobacco as well as listing many prevention and cessation resources. Healthcare access, quality, and competency increases when Tribal clinics respond to the concerns and needs of their community by partnering with appropriate organizations.

Thinking outside of the box and working with nonconventional partners demonstrates GRTHP’s ability to adapt and provide services that address the needs of their community. Every community has unique needs, strengths, and weaknesses. Communities can identify these weaknesses and develop linkages that can fill the gaps in healthcare delivery. Establishing and maintaining these linkages leads to better health outcomes for everyone in the community.