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Increasing Knowledge of Cardiovascular Risk Factors Among African Americans by Use of Community Health Workers: The ABCD Community Intervention Pilot Project

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African Americans have higher rates of cardiovascular disease (CVD) and poorer outcomes compared to others. The American Diabetes Association and the National Diabetes Education Program have promoted use of the ABC approach (glycated hemoglobin A_{1c}, blood pressure, cholesterol) for identifying and controlling the leading indicators of CVD risk. In the present study, researchers added a D factor, for depression, because this disorder is common and also predictive of CVD risk and of control of diabetes. Particularly among low-income African Americans, depression is frequently not targeted or treated. The current study tests the effectiveness of recruiting African Americans in churches and training community health workers (CHWs) to educate their peers about CVD and risk reduction. For the intervention group, CHWs participated in a 16-hour training session and delivered a 6-week tailored educational program with counseling sessions and demonstrations. The control group received a weekly lecture by clinical experts. The CHW active-learning intervention was more effective than lectures by clinical experts in increasing the knowledge of CVD risk. The only significant difference in clinical measures reflected a worsening of HbA_{1c} levels in the control group; the CHW intervention group showed a slight improvement. Participants also learned self-management skills, such as taking blood pressure, measuring glucose, and reading labels. Nevertheless, more longitudinal research and a larger sample size are needed to confirm the impact of CHWs in community settings to change factors associated with CVD risk.

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Keywords

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