The Experiences of Aboriginal Health Workers (AHWs) and Health Professionals Working Collaboratively in the Delivery of Health Care to Aboriginal Australians: A Systematic Review

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Aboriginal Australians experience significant health inequity in relation to non-Aboriginal Australians. Engagement and partnering with Indigenous Australians has been promoted as an effective way to close this health inequity. Australian health policy contains strategies to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) people participating in health service delivery. This promotes increased opportunities for ATSI people to self-determine policies and practices that effect culturally safe care provision to their own people.

AHW’s are recognized as an important part of any health care delivery team trying to engage with and provide culturally responsive care to ATSI people, and an appropriate way of health organisations increasing the numbers of Aboriginal workers participating in health care delivery. AHW’s are trained primary health care professionals. By partnering with clinicians, the cultural distance between ATSI peoples and mainstream health services is narrowed, enabling increased access to health care for ATSI people (HWA, 2011).

Despite the acknowledgement of the benefits of partnership between Aboriginal and mainstream organisations, barriers remain that prevent effective interprofessional partnerships between clinicians and AHW’s (Taylor & Thompson, 2011). If unilateral partnerships develop, this may impact negatively on the ability of health services to meet the needs of ATSI peoples. Interdisciplinary collaboration and partnership is critical to excellence in patient care delivery.

I specifically aimed to explore the following questions:

What are the experiences of AHWs and Health Professionals working in collaborative clinical arrangements delivering care to the Aboriginal people?

What are the perceived factors within a health care organisation, or service delivery model, which enable or obstruct successful working partnerships between AHWs and health professionals?

This presentation will outline the findings of my research pertaining to the above questions, and explain how these findings have been applied in order to support Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Care Workers and midwives in the Aboriginal Metropolitan Family Birthing Program. My presentation will also give a brief outline of the systematic review process.

References:
Health Workforce Australia (2011). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Project: Environmental Scan. Australia: Health Workforce Australia 147.