

18th International Conference on

Nursing & Healthcare

December 05-07, 2016 Dallas, USA

Diabetes risk perception among multi-racial college students

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Background: Although the rapid increase of type 2 diabetes is crossing all socio-economic groups, it is still most prevalent among minorities and the poor. Recent data suggest that non-Hispanic African-American (16%) and Mexican-American (15.7%) adults exhibit higher age-adjusted prevalence than non-hispanic white adults (8.8%) and Asian-Americans are 30-50% more likely to have diabetes than their white counterparts. It is unknown if at risk young adults recognize their increased likelihood of developing diabetes.

Methods: Diabetes risk knowledge, individual risk perception, health status and individual health behaviors were collected and examined from 1,579 multiracial urban college students. Students have little knowledge of diabetes risk factors; identifying less than three of the 10 most important factors. Significant variation exists in the understanding of risk among racial/ethnic groups; only 0.02% of Asian, 14.0% of Hispanic and 22.8% of black students recognized that their race increased their risk. Among those students reporting three or more known risk factors (n=541) only 39% perceived that they were at high risk.

Discussion: These under-estimators (students unaware of their high risk) scored lower on a diabetes knowledge test (P=0.03) than those who acknowledged their risk; indicating that the cause of under-estimating risk may be, at least, in part due to a lack of information about risk factors. Asian students may be unaware of their risk as Asians develop diabetes at a much lower or normal BMI than other groups.

Conclusion: There is a pressing need to heighten knowledge and perception of diabetes risk among young adults in all groups to decrease the future burden of diabetes.

Biography

Lorraine Mongiello is a registered Dietitian/Nutritionist and a certified Diabetes Educator. She has specialization in "Public health, nutrition and the prevention and treatment of diabetes". She was Director of Campaign Against Diabetes at City University of New York (CUNY) and was Director of Diabetes Care Center at St. Charles Hospital, where she implemented a diabetes education program serving more than 500 people annually. Currently, she is a Professor in Clinical Nutrition and Interdisciplinary Health Sciences departments at New York Institute of Technology (NYIT) in Old Westbury, New York. She has completed her Doctor of Public Health degree at CUNY Graduate Center, Master's degree in Nutrition and Public Health at Teacher's college, Columbia University and Bachelor's Degree in Food and Nutrition Science at Lehman College in New York City. Her current research focuses on "The social determinates of health and how the environment impacts health behaviors among young adults".

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