Testing a Coaching Program to Help Adults with Diabetes Living in Rural Alabama Take Their Medicine as Directed

Principal investigator

Monika M. Safford, MD

Organization

Joan & Sanford I. Weill Medical College of Cornell University

What was the research about?

Diabetes is a long-term health problem that causes high blood sugar levels. Medicine can help people manage diabetes and prevent other health problems. But up to half of patients with diabetes don't take medicines as directed.

In rural Alabama, many more people die as a result of diabetes than in the United States as a whole. In this study, the research team wanted to learn if a peer coaching program helped adults with diabetes living in rural Alabama take medicine as directed and improve their health. The peer coaches were African-American women who had diabetes or took care of someone who did. The coaches supported patients in managing their diabetes. The team compared adults in the program with those who weren't in it.

What were the results?

After six months, compared with patients who weren't in the program, patients who were reported more improvement in

- How often they took their medicine as directed
- How confident they were in their ability to keep up with their medicine
- How strongly they believed it was important to take their medicine

Patients who were and weren't in the program didn't differ in blood sugar, blood pressure, cholesterol

levels, or body mass index. They also didn't differ in quality of life.

Who was in the study?

The study included 403 adults with diabetes living in rural Alabama. Of these patients, 91 percent were African American, and 9 percent were other races. The average age was 57, and 78 percent were women. Also, 69 percent earned less than \$20,000 per year. All patients reported problems taking medicine as directed before the study.

What did the research team do?

The research team assigned patients by chance to one of two groups. In the first group, patients received educational DVDs and an activity book for the peer coaching sessions. The DVDs told stories about how people accepted their diabetes and overcame barriers to taking medicine. During 11 phone sessions over six months, peer coaches helped patients

- Work through the activity book
- Set health goals
- Figure out how to overcome barriers to meeting goals

In the second group, patients received a general health education DVD. The DVD covered topics such as cancer screening, eye health, and oral health.

At the start of the study and six months later, the research team collected patient surveys and measured patients' blood sugar, blood pressure, cholesterol, and body mass index.

People living in rural Alabama provided input throughout the study.

What were the limits of the study?

Some patients in the study said they didn't have access to the fresh fruits and vegetables the program suggested, making it hard to follow the diet suggestions. The study took place in rural Alabama.

Results may differ in other locations. The study may not have followed patients long enough to see changes in health.

Future research could test the program in other rural areas.

How can people use the results?

People who provide health services in rural areas could use the results when considering ways to help people with diabetes take medicines as directed.

To learn more about this project, visit www.pcori.org/Safford246.