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Enhancing Attendance of the Greater Burlington YMCA Diabetes Fitness Program

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INTRODUCTION

Since 1999, the Burlington YMCA has offered a free aerobics class to members of the community with diabetes. Additionally, the class regularly monitors participants’ health status. These data support the well-established benefit of exercise in diabetes.

OBJECTIVE

The enrollment and retention rates in the YMCA Diabetes Fitness Program have been disappointingly low. By surveying local primary care physicians, current and past YMCA program participants, and non-participating diabetes patients, we hope to explore reasons behind this trend.

From our data we will formulate recommendations, from which the YMCA can better serve its population. Consequently, we hope the full potential of this program may be fully realized.

METHODS

We surveyed 3 specific populations of interest:

- Physicians
- Current and Past Participants
- Potential Participants

Potential Participants — Survey’s were made available at the Community Health Center of Burlington and VT Regional Diabetes Center.

RESULTS

ABSTRACT

Since 1999, the Burlington YMCA has offered a free aerobics class to members of the community with diabetes. Additionally, the class regularly monitors participants’ health status. These data support the well-established benefit of exercise in diabetes.

Increase Awareness

- Continue class in Burlington Free Press
- Include pertinent information: no cost, transportation information, and physical accommodations possible
- Add program information to Seasonal YMCA Publication and Website

Increase awareness within the medical community

- Advertise to doctors on regular basis
  - Spread information at physician gatherings/meetings (Grand Rounds)
  - Supply quick info handouts to physicians (Rx pads)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Increase Accessibility

- Weekend option: add additional class
- Provide transportation: Bus from parking lot of CHC/Diabetes Center
- Provide free parking
- Provide referral sheets that can be faxed directly to and from physicians’ offices to relieve pts of this burden

Empower the individual

- Physicians must not assume lack of motivation on pt’s part
- Ask directed questions
- Create personalized plan around individual’s barriers

Encourage enthusiasm through advertisements

- Establish a visible link on web site
- Create vibrant advertisement in seasonal YMCA publication
- Ensure visibility to elder populations

LESSONS LEARNED

1. The class works: the average hemoglobin A1C level for the participants has decreased every year since 1999 as a result of the YMCA Diabetes Fitness Program.

2. Roughly 43% of surveyed practitioners had never heard of the YMCA Diabetes Fitness class. This highlights the importance of improved communication between the program directors and healthcare providers in the community.

3. It is essential that providers not let personal bias or assumptions interfere with recommending the fitness class to their diabetic patients.

Figure 1: Decreasing HbA1C of participants, measured before and after each 12 week session

Figure 2: Decreasing blood pressure of participants, measured before and after each 12 week session

Figure 3: Barriers to joining exercise fitness programs. Physicians: lack of motivation followed by transportation, time of day, and location. Diabetic patients: time of day, location, transportation/ parking.

Figure 4: The most important factors in joining a fitness program are time of day, location, support groups, and a personalized program.

Figure 5: According to class participants, benefits of the program included reduced HbA1C levels, improved fitness, social support, weight loss, and self-confidence.

Figure 6: Past participants cited that parking, weight loss, increased fitness level, no required referent, and more frequent classes would be incentives to return to the program. Location was not a cited barrier for past participants.

REFERENCES


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