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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 exercise 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.

ABSTRACT
Background: Participants of the YMCA Diabetes Fitness Program have benefited in their health and well being since 1999. Despite these benefits, however, enrollment and retention rates remain low.

Objective and Methods: We explored the barriers to participation and retention by surveying current and past program participants, non-participating diabetic patients, and healthcare providers in the community.

Results: Major barriers to participation included parking/transportation, time of day, and location, as well as lack of knowledge about the program. Physicians’ also cited lack of motivation as a major barrier to exercise.

Conclusions: We formulated a series of recommendations to assist the YMCA in overcoming participation/retention barriers. Our results highlighted the importance of adequate communication between the YMCA Diabetes Fitness Program and the medical community.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Increase Awareness
- Continue ads in Burlington Free Press
- Include all 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)

Support the individual
- Ensure dependable, consistent, educated instructors on diabetes/exercise benefits

Encourage enthusiasm through advertisements
- Establish a visible link on web site
- Create vibrant advertisement in seasonal YMCA publication
- Ensure visibility to elderly populations

INTRODUCTION
The enrollment and retention rates in the YMCA Diabetes Fitness Program have been disappointingly low.

OBJECTIVE
The enrollment and retention rates in the YMCA Diabetes Fitness Program have been disappointingly low.

METHODS
We surveyed 3 specific populations of interest:
- Physicians
- Current and Past Participants
- Potential Participants

RESULTS
Only 57% of physicians had heard of the class. However, 100% of physicians stated that they will refer patients to the program. Only 14% of the non-participants had heard of the program (via their physician’s office and the Burlington Free Press).

REFERENCES

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. Only 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.

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