

Awareness Activities

When communities and individuals organize diabetes awareness activities, they are sowing seeds that will eventually take root. The message they are conveying, ‘know more about diabetes’ could mean the difference between living a life of quality or suffering life-threatening health problems from this incurable disease.

The major advantage of knowing more about diabetes was emphasized during Diabetes Awareness Month in the United States:

“Regular screenings for eye and foot health, blood sugar levels, exercise and healthy diet will improve the quality of life for a person with diabetes.”¹

With this message to alert the public about the seriousness of diabetes and the importance of knowing its risk factors, symptoms and treatment options, the following pages describe just a few of the many successful and innovative strategies:

¹ Guidry MD, J.; Bureau of Communications & Inquiry Services; Department of Health and Hospitals, State of Louisiana; November 13, 2000.

Teiakonekwensatsikhe:tare
(“our blood is sweet”)
Diabetes Belt

Activity: **Annual Wampum Belt long-distance walk to Native communities** was started in 1997 by Joe Jacobs of Kahnawake, Quebec.

Goal: To bring diabetes awareness to different Native communities, both on and off-reserve, that request the Diabetes Belt. There is a focus on reaching out to children because they are the future generation, and to educating diabetics. It is hoped that this belt will get diabetes programs in the communities it has traveled to.

The belt as a Teaching tool: Joe explains,

“The belt came from our ancestors to make treaties and agreements with other nations. The whole idea is to use the belt to get a message across to other nations and for these nations to work together to fight this disease. Also, kids in school were asked to put some messages on the belt and examples of their messages are: ‘exercise’ and ‘eat healthy’.

Description of Activity: Whenever a request is made by a Native community, the belt is taken there by walking, bicycling, canoeing, etc. to promote diabetes awareness. Requests are not limited to Native communities in Canada. When the belt first arrives in a destination community, Joe talks about the meaning of the belt as it pertains to diabetes and the lifestyle changes needed to control the disease.

The destination community keeps the belt as long as they want and it is their duty to take it through their community and speak about diabetes.

**Community
Responsibility:**

A community wishing to receive the belt makes a request to the community holding the belt. This 'destination' community promotes the activity by recruiting people who will be walking, seeking donations such as food, refreshments, cars/vans to drive alongside the walkers and give rides to those who are tired. This community also makes the arrangements to receive the walkers.

Safety factors:

For medical reasons, it is strongly advised that persons with health concerns seek medical approval before walking long distances. In addition, it is ideal to have medical personnel such as a doctor, nurse, paramedic, or EMT on hand in case an emergency arises. For walkers' safety on the road, a police escort in front and back of the walkers is recommended.

**Role of
Volunteers:**

Volunteers help with fund-raising and seeking or donating money, food, rides, and lodging. Raffles are held and local organizations are asked for donations. **The entire activity is made possible by the giving hearts of its many volunteers.**

**For more
Information:**

Contact Joe Jacobs in Kahnawake, Quebec at (450) 635-3539.

National Sneaker Day – Poker Walk Challenge

Activity: **Short-distance, poker playing/best decorated sneakers walk** within a community is becoming a popular diabetes awareness activity in many communities. The following description was provided by Health Information Services of the Shawanaga First Nation, Ontario.

Goal: Poker Walk is held annually to raise awareness about the importance of exercise. It is also held to launch the local Health Unit's summer program.

**Description of
Activity:**

Activity is held on a weekday during business hours and allows people to participate at their convenience. As participants walk the 1 mile (1.62 km) course, they stop at five checkpoints along the way to pick up a playing card. Every checkpoint has two decks of cards to be able to distribute one card per walker. When walkers reach the final destination, they reveal their cards and the person who has the highest poker hand wins a prize. Prizes are also given to the person holding the worst poker hand, the walker wearing the most creatively decorated sneakers, and to area businesses/organizations having the greatest rate of participation.

**Poker Walk
Instructions:**

(Instructions adapted from the flyer distributed by the Mino Bimaadsawin Health Centre, Ontario)

1. Participants will walk a pre-determined route, which if walked directly, should be a minimum of 30 minutes. **DID YOU KNOW** that you gain health benefits from just 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week?
2. You will be walking to five check points as marked on the map given to you.

3. Pick up a card at each check point.
4. Don't tip your hand! Keep your cards a secret because the best hand is a winner.
5. Be sure to register your poker hand at the last checkpoint on the walk.
6. Complete an event evaluation and use this form to enter your name for a prize draw.
7. Keep your cards; the tip on each card will keep you active long after the Poker Walk is over.

**For more
Information:**

Contact Barbara Flaherty, Community Health Nurse in Saugeen First Nation, Ontario at (519) 797-3336.

Ecological Garden

Activity: Creation of different walking paths where people can pick berries, herbs and medicines in community gardens found on en route.

Goal: To promote physical activity and make available fresh produce, which is very expensive locally.

How it began: This project is based on the community garden model existing in Kahnawake, Quebec. Four local people are hired to become the caretakers whose duties include the planting of and caring of the gardens. These caretakers will receive training from two project consultants on where, what, how and when to plant.

For more information: Contact Jeannette Vollant, CHR, Schefferville, Quebec at (418) 585-2667.