iCON: Supporting Chinese and South Asian BC citizens for optimal self-management

A community-driven health promotion initiative to improve chronic disease self-management.

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Health research has consistently demonstrated that active patient engagement and participation in chronic disease self-management results in significant and measurable health outcome improve-

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ments.[1] However, cultural minorities can be disadvantaged in accessing information and services to support them in their optimal self-management,[2,3] limited by their ability to fully participate in their health care due to barriers in language, literacy levels, and lack of culturally relevant health resources.[2-6] To bridge the health care disparities in British Columbia, the UBC Faculty of Medicine eHealth Strategy Office launched the Inter-Cultural Online Health Network (iCON) in 2007.

What is iCON?
The Inter-Cultural Online Health Network supports multicultural communities, patients, and caregivers across BC to optimize chronic disease prevention and self-management.[7-9] We work in partnership with the BC Ministry of Health Patients as Partners initiative, health authorities, and community health professionals to advance patient- and family-centred care. Together with other programs within the Patients as Partners network, iCON supports patients and families to become active in self-care and engage in health care improvement. For more information see the BC Ministry of Health Patients as Partners Annual Report, 2012–2013 (www.patientsaspartners.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/2012-annual_report_digital.pdf).

Through skills-building workshops and public health forums, we provide culturally relevant and language-appropriate health information on a variety of chronic diseases along with resources to help patients and families navigate the BC health system. To reach a wider audience, health information is also shared via webcasts, a website (iconproject.org), and community television and radio programming.

Since 2007 iCON has hosted 28 public health forums and workshops with Chinese- and Punjabi-speaking communities on a range of health topics. These events have engaged over 14 260 in-person and webcast participants, and have attracted 94 428 unique visitors to the website (61% of whom are unique first-time users).

What does iCON do?
With the goal of helping patients improve health outcomes through behavior change, risk reduction, and lifestyle modification, iCON's delivery model focuses on four pillars to ensure programming is responsive to community needs:

Culturally tailored outreach
iCON features culturally adapted programming in the community's native language to improve access to chronic disease management education.

Partnerships and collaboration

iCON collaborates with community health care providers along with partners from health authorities, community organizations, educational institutions, government, and media to promote best practices in chronic disease prevention and management. iCON also partners with students and health professional trainees to design and deliver community outreach activities while gaining insight into culturally competent care.

Evaluation

Anchoring on the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's triple-aim framework,[10] iCON measures program impact on patients and mobilization, tracking patient activation, intention for behavior change, and e-health literacy for self-care over time.

Health information technology in patient self-management

iCON works with communities to assess the preparedness of individuals to adopt e-health, such as appropriately using web-based health information for chronic disease prevention and self-management (e.g., 8-1-1 HealthLinkBC, health apps, and the myehealth.ca portal). Our programming integrates activities to build e-health awareness, raise e-health literacy levels, and share best practices in using e-health tools to support health and wellness.

Interested in getting involved?

We invite all readers, doctors, and practitioners in BC who are interested in supporting our multicultural populations in their excellence in health and wellness to get in touch. How can we work together to optimally engage community members and their families and actualize patient-centred, family-focused, and community-engaged care in BC? We welcome your thoughts and participation. For further information contact Dr Kendall Ho via e-mail at Kendall.Ho@ubc.ca or at 604 875-4111, ext. 6-9153.

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