

Family planning workshops conducted by Seattle Indian Center

Family Planning Workshops for Indian Americans and Alaska Natives were conducted by the Seattle Indian Center through the support of Region X/HEW.

Workshops were held in Seattle, Wa., Yakima, Wa., and Anchorage, Alaska for Native Americans and family planning service providers.

The Workshops have provided Indian and Native individuals with an opportunity to communicate to non-Indian and Native individuals traditional tribal health care values and practices.

Information gathered from the workshops indicate the existence of a well-structured family planning systems among the Native peoples of this continent long before the arrival of the white man. Such systems included very efficient methods of contraception and fertility, prenatal care, infant delivery and adolescent counselling.

For the past two centuries white society has misinterpreted these health care systems as primitive and/or supernatural. The unfortunate result of such misinterpretation has been a loss of cultural pride on the part

of Indian Americans and Alaska Natives.

Family Planning Workshops for Indian Americans and Alaska Natives represent an attempt to renew cultural pride by increasing participant awareness of the Indian and Native health care systems which relate to human reproduction.

The workshops have revealed the importance of spiritual values in Indian/Native family planning. Since the white doctor separated the treatment of illnesses into physical and psychological categories, the reality of the spirit world has been left to decay among the ruins of alcoholism and depression.

It is only recently that a number of concerned whites have questioned the validity of many gynecological practices such as the use of anesthetics during childbirth.

These particular individuals have incorporated the use of massage, herbs and roots, various forms of sweat bathing and midwifery into their more natural approaches to family planning.

Indians and Natives of both sexes, and many of whom are

employed by Region X/CED, spoke to workshop participants concerning the reasons why Indian and Native clients are reticent about coming to family planning clinics.

Such reasons included: 1) The invasion of privacy, 2) The use of technical terms which often prevent clients from mak-

ing "informed" choices concerning methods of contraception, 3) Attitudes of mistrust and disrespect for Indian and Native culture, 4) A pushy attitude which is sometimes interpreted as genocide and 5) The cold formality of clinical settings.

Physicians and other family planning service providers were

given an opportunity to discuss with workshop participants their ideas concerning Native Americans and family planning. The more sensitive providers expressed their concern for the lack of cultural understanding often experienced by Native American family planning clients.

(Continued on page 12)

Family planning worksop . . .

(Continued from page 5)

The less sensitive were reluctant to admit that such problems existed, relying heavily on the use of statistics which indicated decreased fertility and infant and maternal death rates since the arrival of white medicine.

As was evidenced at the Sovereign Native Women's Conference in Lawrence, Kansas in May, 1976, Native American Women are most dubious about the safety of many present-day contraceptives. Fortunately, there are alternatives available, and a very sophisticated natural family planning method is presently is being

researched and utilized in several clinics across the country.

Hopefully, by continuing to develop interest in past, present and future Indian/Native family planning systems, a renewed sense of individual responsibility for human sexuality will be realized.

The Family Planning Workshops for Indian Americans and Alaska Natives represents at least the beginning of this process.

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