Establishing Best Practices for Alaska Native Elders
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Abstract
Background: Many published “best practices” for substance abuse are not effective in the treatment of Alaska Native populations.
Results: Individuals are healing outside of “best practices or science-based practices.”
Conclusions: Alaska Native and other minority populations may need methods grounded in the individual’s cultural traditional values and beliefs to restore and preserve healthy relationships.

Original Concept of “Best Practice”
- Focuses on interventions that work best in the substance abuse prevention field.
- Funding for prevention programs is based mostly on research literature that documents the effectiveness of prevention strategies.
- These “science-based” prevention and treatment programs have become “standards” utilized by federal agencies to ascertain the efficacy of programs providing social, mental health, and substance abuse to the general population. Few practices deal with Native and other minority populations who may have a different world view.

Re-conceptualizing the Framework of “Best Practice” within Alaska Native Communities
- Seen as “healing practices.”
- Traditionally, the purpose of “healing journeys” is for the individuals to access their own answers and find their own strengths.
- Self-directed strategies are believed to restore a sense of self-worth and healthy relationships.

Findings: Cultural Foundation of Healing
The holistic cultural foundation of healing journeys encompasses the following:
- Recognizing that the cause and nature of problems come from within one’s own person and community.
- Accepting that the individual takes ownership of the problem.
- Recognizing the need for community involvement in the healing process.

Recommendations
Recommendations from “best” or “healing practices” in Alaska Native communities include:
- Recognizing the cyclical relationship between the problems of the individual and the community. The two are inseparable; in order to improve individual health, the health of communities must also be addressed.
- Programs must be grounded in traditional values, beliefs, and health practices of Alaska Native peoples.
- Programs must recognize and work with existing, and often complex, cultural structures.
- Programs must recognize that generations of community problem solving techniques have preceded and can be applied to contemporary health and social problems in Native and other minority communities.

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