

Community health knowledge sharing: Translating safe infant sleep education to Aboriginal families in South Australia – insights from an interprofessional collaboration

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Background

In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infants are over-represented in SIDS and SUDI cases, with rates four times that of non-Indigenous babies. Important to note is that there is currently no safe sleep space alternative provided by the health system for Aboriginal families that recognise cultural practices of co-sleeping and closeness to baby. Health care professionals are continually challenged by the need to provide health information in a way that successfully changes health practices. Yet how mainstream health personnel connect with Aboriginal families around the important issue of safe sleeping practices, is not clear.

Aim of the study

Explore a collaborative approach between nurses and Aboriginal community researchers to translate safe sleep messages into the community.

Methods

This study is a part of the Safely Sleeping Aboriginal Babies in SA – Doing it Together where 77 families received safe sleep education along with a Pepi-Pod®, a plastic box which acts as a separate sleep space and surface and enables co-sleeping. The project included an education blitz counting 235 health care professionals.

Results

Individual safe sleep education sessions are personalised, easy to understand and put into practice. As part of the safe sleep education there were visual tools used to help support the research team in communicating the importance of safely sleeping their babies, including a small plastic tube to signify an airway. A significant number of families spoke about the tube and how it gave them a visual image of why a flat safe space for babies to sleep is so important. Results from the education blitz for health professionals also identified that health professional knowledge was relatively low relating to what makes a baby's head and airway at risk of SUDI. Focusing on the air tube may offer a way forward for safe sleep messaging. When babies outgrew the pods, families passed on not only the pods, but also the safe sleep education. Reciprocity is an important aspect of Aboriginal cultures, and in this instance safe sleep education was passed on like a message stick.

Conclusions and implications

This project has contributed to an increase in knowledge of safe sleep practices amongst Aboriginal families in SA and highlighted the role that Aboriginal families play in translating safe sleep education in the community.