

Hispanic adults with diabetes could benefit from peer support interventions

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Diabetes is a global health problem that disproportionally affects individuals of ethnic and racial minorities. Minorities are more likely to experience complications from the disease, and the death rate from diabetes among Hispanics is 50 percent higher than non-Hispanic whites, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health.

In the study, researchers at the University of Missouri School of Medicine examined the effectiveness of peer support interventions, where [diabetic patients](#) received support from a person who had knowledge from their own experiences with diabetes or someone who had been affected by diabetes, but may not have the disease themselves, such as a caregiver or family member. The researchers found that the interventions were effective at improving the [blood sugar levels](#) of participants from minority groups, especially those of Hispanic ethnicity.

"Peer supporters can help diabetic patients better manage their disease by providing advice on diet and exercise regimens, monitoring blood sugar levels and coping with the new diagnoses," said Sonal Patil, M.D., assistant professor of Family and Community Medicine at the MU School of Medicine. "Peer support interventions have been suggested by the World Health Organization as a way to improve self-care behaviors of diabetic patients, but an adequate review of the effectiveness of such interventions has not happened."

Patil and her colleagues analyzed results from 17 randomized control

trials on diabetic peer support interventions conducted from 1960 to 2015. The researchers compared blood sugar levels of patients who received peer support to those who received similar care, but did not participate in peer interventions. Patil found that peer support interventions modestly improved patients' [blood sugar](#) levels, with the most significant improvements found in studies with predominantly minority participants.

"Previous research has found that when culturally appropriate health education is provided to people with diabetes who belong to ethnic [minority groups](#), their glycemic control and knowledge of diabetes improves," Patil said. "Our findings suggest that peer health coaches might provide more culturally appropriate health education in ethnic minority populations, particularly Latino ones."

Patil said that peer support interventions not only help diabetic patients, but also provide benefits to the peers delivering the support.

"Previous research has found that being a peer supporter to others actually increases one's own self-management of the disease," Patil said.

More random control trials are needed with African American participants before she can determine the effectiveness of peer support for that specific community, Patil said.

Additionally, Patil noted that [peer support](#) interventions should be done in conjunction, and not in place of, regular visits with the patient's [health](#) provider.

More information: S. J. Patil et al, Peer Support Interventions for Adults With Diabetes: A Meta-Analysis of Hemoglobin A1c Outcomes, *The Annals of Family Medicine* (2016). [DOI: 10.1370/afm.1982](https://doi.org/10.1370/afm.1982)

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