

NLN 2016 Abstract Submission from Arizona

Title: WIC Online

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Background Information and Project Goals:

The WIC Program has seen a decline in participation nationwide, particularly in child participants. USDA granted the Arizona WIC Program a three-year special project study grant to focus on child retention in WIC. Arizona WIC chose to explore offering a new and innovative method of nutrition education delivery by providing online facilitated nutrition group discussion sessions (WIC Online) to WIC participants. The goal is to increase retention of children in the WIC Program by reducing identified barriers to participation, including the perception of social stigma associated with participation in WIC, the hassles of participation, such as time constraints, lack of transportation, and the amount of time that is perceived as “wasted” waiting to be seen at the clinic.

Methods:

Skype was chosen as the technology platform of choice for WIC Online because it is available free and is popular among WIC participants. Intervention clinic staff were trained in facilitation as well as in five (5) group discussion curricula for children. They offer WIC Online in addition to regular client services while control clinics continue to conduct business as usual. Since participants are allowed to enroll at any time during the year of implementation, a dose-response relationship between the number of online nutrition education sessions and retention rates can be established.

Results/Summary/Discussion:

The project is currently ongoing and so far, we have had challenges with technology, recruitment, and training. The Skype technology requires internet speeds of at least 5Mbps and many clinics are currently at 1.5Mbps. Many agencies also block the use of Skype and therefore collaboration with local IT has been essential. We have seen poor recruitment due to staff not understanding the project well enough and not tracking recruitment in the participant record. Training has also been a challenge as we introduced 5 lessons all at once causing facilitators to become overwhelmed. All WIC Online participants (14/14) have stated they enjoyed their session and want to continue on WIC for another year. If the project is successful in increasing retention of children in WIC, statewide rollout of WIC Online will occur after Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) is rolled out. WIC Online will allow clients to receive participant-centered nutrition education and food benefits remotely once EBT is implemented. This has the potential to increase participation without increasing congestion in the clinic.