Hula & Health
Kumu Hula Perspectives

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Learning Objectives

• Provide insights into process and protocol of utilizing a Hawaiian cultural practice in a health intervention

• Highlight Native Hawaiian world view of maintaining health and creating well-being

• Identify health benefits from hula specified by Kumu hula
Hula

• Iconic Native Hawaiian cultural creative art
• A dance form endemic to Hawai‘i
• Dancer’s role is to express and enhance the literal or poetic meaning of the song or chant
• Serves to maintain stories, poetry and cultural memory of the people
• Expression of cultural identity
Kumu Hula

• Definition of “Kumu”
  1. Bottom, base, foundation, basis;
  2. Teacher, tutor, manual;
  3. Beginning, source, origin;

• Guardians and educators of hula traditions, practice and performance

• Designation earned through formal training within a hālau hula, or within a family of hula lineage
Hula Enabling Lifestyle Adaptation (HELA) Study

• Research study of a hula-based cardiac rehabilitation program
• First study to scientifically assess the use of hula in a health intervention
• NIH funded, five year study
• CBPR guided
• Kumu hula interviews were used to inform the CR program design
Cultural & Research Protocol

Cultural Protocol
• Conceptual approval from personal Kumu hula
• Conceptual approval from personal nā kupuna
• Contact Kumu through personal and hula network
• Arrange interviews for Kumu’s preference
• Select appropriate makana

Research Protocol
• Review of literature
• Study design
• Interview guide
• Define enrollment criteria
• IRB approval
• Arrange & conduct interviews
• Data analysis
Who did we talk to?

- 6 Kumu hula
- 5 female, 1 male
- 5 different islands
- 20-50 years teaching
- Widely acknowledged hula expertise
- Various hula lineage
How did we talk to them?

• Individual interviews guided by open ended questions
• 60-90 minutes taped with permission & transcribed
• Incidence density analysis
What did we find?

• Consensus that hula can be appropriate for use as part of a health intervention such as cardiac rehabilitation.

• Re-asserts Native Hawaiian worldview:
  – in order to establish health there must be integration of mental, emotional, physical, cultural and spiritual well-being

• Training in hula requires all spheres which differs with stages of training and age of dancer

  “If you focus on the hula you will get your [health] outcomes, but if you focus only on the physical aspect of the dance, success is not so likely” -- Kumu ekahi
Physical

• Continuous dancing can be a rigorous workout
• Dancers become very in-tuned with their bodies
• Intensity level is adjustable with choice of song/oli and choreography

“Like many things related to Hawaiian culture, there are levels and stages that you go through ... often times it starts with physical, it continues to intellectual, and then it continues to spiritual.”

Kumu ekahi
Mental & Emotional

• Requirement of understanding the words and meaning of the song or chant involves history, geography, cultural knowledge
• Reduce stress, “mind-chatter”, “leave it at the door”, “turn yourself over to the story”
• Social connections can be strong
  “... when they’re dancing and smiling and don’t have a care in the world, and they feel connected to each other and they feel connected to me, and the music moves them....it’s that belief in yourself, that you’re beautiful, you can do it, you can accomplish this, you can do anything, you know, and that together...all of us together makes it happen.”

Kumu ekolu
Spiritual

• Learning hula and therefore the poetry and stories connects one to the past, the place, and the people
• Comes in stages, as a dancer’s skill and abilities increase often so does spiritual aspects of hula

“They aloha you, you aloha them, you aloha what you are doing, you aloha your teacher, you know. And when you finally get better you aloha your health.” --Kumu ‘ehā
Maintaining Cultural Integrity & Appropriateness

- Should be lead by a kumu hula or person who has the approval of a kumu hula

- Understanding the meaning of the poetry of the song or chant is essential to the teaching

“the cultural mandate of hula is to maintain the stories, poetry, and cultural memory of the people” --Kumu ‘elima
Social Support

- Strong social support is created when hula is taught in traditional context
- Familial association are encouraged
  “hula sisters and hula brothers”
- Bi-directional social support formation between dancers as well as with kumu hula

“Our hula brothers and sisters carry us through the hard times” -- Kumu ‘elima
Dealing with physical disability

• Encourage dancers to continuous self-assess, with kumu hula monitoring and guiding

• Dancers can participating as able, returning in phases, such as:
  – sitting and doing only hand motions
  – partial extensions moving to full extensions
Retention

• Increasing knowledge of Hawaiian culture is of great interest especially to Native Hawaiians
• Setting culturally appropriate goal such as a ho‘ike
• Class size: at least 12 – 20 dancers
Application to HELA Study

- Post-hospitalization cardiac rehab
- 12 weeks at 3 times a week
- Taught by kumu hula
- Most had no hula experience
- 8 – 12 in each class, n= 32/30
- Included warm-up and cool down (sing & walk), stretches, foot patterns, 1 hula ʻauana, 1 hula kahiko
- 10 – 40 minutes continual dancing
Mahalo loa

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