



NOVEMBER 17, 2018

PIHOA PACIFIC ISLANDS PUBLIC HEALTH TRAINING CENTRE CONDUCTS DEPRESSION SCREENING DURING WORLD DIABETES DAY

PALIKIR, POHNPEI, FSM -- Over 150 individuals were screened for depression during the World Diabetes Day event held at the College of Micronesia-FSM (COM-FSM) on 16-November-2018 in Pohnpei, FSM. The event was a joint effort between the PIHOA Pacific Islands Public Health Training Centre (PIPHTC) and the Doctors and Dentists for Tomorrow (DDFT) program's MEDDENT Society. Those screened were primarily students from COM-FSM, but also included faculty and staff.

DDFT students worked with Dr. Brian P. Mangum, Coordinator of the PIHOA PIPHTC to provide screening using a rapid screening tool commonly used in primary care to identify persons with, or at risk for, depression. The screening was part of the DDFT programs efforts to prepare regional students for entry into medical and dental school through a rigorous course of study that includes learning applied skills, such as depression screening, as well as rotations at the Pohnpei State Hospital from day one of the program.

According to Ms. Esmerelda Mudong, a DDFT student and Vice President of the MEDDENT Society, which is the community service arm of the DDFT program, "Depression is a serious problem in Micronesia. But we don't talk about it. People think that if someone is depressed it is because they are weak, or did something wrong. This stigma makes it hard for people to get the help they need. Events like this help Micronesians realize that depression is treatable, and that it is not your fault."

The PIPHTC also developed various educational displays and programs detailing the treatment available for depression in Pohnpei. There were also displays and educational material on the linkage between diabetes and depression, with diabetics being three times as likely to experience depression than those without diabetes.

Those who were identified as having mild-moderate depression were provided brief interventions at the time of screening, and then referred to community-based resources, such as counselors, primary care physicians, and the student health and counseling centers. Those at risk for depression, but with only mild mood disturbances, were provided lifestyle counseling advice related to diet, exercise, and stress management skills, particularly relate to the tension of being students as final exams approach.

"Preliminary analysis of the confidential data collected during the event indicate that a significant number of students are suffering from mild-moderate depression," said Dr. Mangum. "We can use this data to work with our partners, especially COM-FSM's ancillary services, to develop community-based interventions to address this need. We can also use this data to inform our future delivery of continuing professional development programs in the area of mental health services." PIHOA PIPHTC is currently working with the COM-FSM Division of Health Sciences, the Guam/Micronesia AHEC, and the Pohnpei Department of Health Services, to develop mental health and substance abuse counsellor training and certification programs.

The PIHOA PIPHTC is part of the larger Western Regional Public Health Training Centre based at the University of Arizona's Zuckerman College of Public Health. This HRSA-funded program works to upskill the public health workforce of the USAPI, as well as provide additional support services across the region.

