

Advocating for Culturally-Relevant Therapy and Referral Networks

One Father's Efforts To Better Connect People with Alternative Therapy Options



September 2016

Samba Fall is compassionate, committed and vivacious. A Senegal native, he has dedicated his life to helping African families and children better connect with their cultures through his nonprofit Multicultural Kids Network. The organization provides social support for patients and their families by combining behavioral health with physical health and healing in a culturally competent approach. Mr. Fall's drive for this work came from his own family's experience navigating the healthcare system after his daughter's premature birth in 2008.

Discovering alternative therapies

When his daughter was born, he and his wife sought the best possible care for her, but felt as if some of the recommended treatments and medications weren't working or were unnecessary.

Amid the tiring process of trying multiple recommended treatments and specialists, Samba learned of a holistic healing tool from his own African culture called an African healing drum.

Encouraged by this alternative form of care, he found the drum to be extremely helpful in improving his daughter's well-being on a variety of levels. The rhythmic drumming practice began to refine her motor skills, focus her attention and build her physical strength where it had been lacking. Before healing drumming, the Falls' experience coordinating their daughter's care was filled with trips to physical therapy, occupational therapy, neurology appointments, and multiple medications. After focusing on drumming therapy, their daughter continued to improve and no longer needed certain therapies or medications.



As he learned more about the power of healing drumming, he discovered that it was also an alternative method of healing for depression and anxiety. Happy with his daughter's progress and inspired by what he was learning about the range of mental and physical benefits of drumming, Samba eagerly spoke with his doctors about their family's experience. While some of her doctors seemed familiar with the idea of healing through rhythmic drumming, it was not a recognized therapy option in Western medicine, which meant the doctors had no referral recommendations to suggest. Without the legitimization of drumming as a therapy and no referral options available, the Falls had to navigate this new path alone.

Creating more inclusive referral networks

As some providers try to adapt and become more inclusive, limited referral networks and lack of coverage from insurance companies leave patients unable to access culturally specific care options that are grounded in traditional practices. An expanded, culturally-competent referral system and education for providers about a broader range of traditional treatments could lead to a greater emphasis on diversified, effective, and whole-patient approaches to care.

Advocates and partners for patient health

Motivated to create a change, Samba became an advocate for this alternative form of healing, and worked tirelessly to connect with clinics and health organizations throughout the Twin Cities. His passion for creating greater access to these effective treatment options for patients brought him into a productive working relationship with Brenda Kennelly.

As the Clinic Manager at the St. Anthony and Brooklyn Park Hennepin County Medical Center clinics, Brenda attended a demonstration by Multicultural Kids Network and knew she had to share the technique and its benefits with her staff. With their backing, she invited Samba to set up during clinic hours and interact with patients through the healing drumming. She was blown away by the positive response from patients, many of which seemed to instantly connect with the drumming.

With firsthand and anecdotal evidence of the impact it could have on English and non-English speaking patients with depression and anxiety, Brenda is working hard with her team and insurance companies to make this a billable service. Thinking about the future, Brenda says, “You send people home with medicine and you hope they take it correctly and that it works for them, but with drumming, I can see the results in our patients almost immediately. It’s not going to cure or be appropriate for everyone, but we can see it make a difference for people and their community. We’re driven to find ways to continue this partnership for the good of our patient community.”

This project is partially funded by a \$45 million State Innovation Model (SIM) cooperative agreement, awarded to the Minnesota Departments of Health and Human Services in 2013 by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation to help implement the Minnesota Accountable Health Model.