Promoting Equity in Health Information

Partners for Health Information and Health Information Partners (HIPS) -

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Partners for Health Information and HIPS Goals

- Overcome racism in online health information access and use among low-income working class residents who use community health centers in Washington, DC.
- Expand awareness of reliable health information for health professionals and the public.
- Develop multi-racial and ethnic collaborations among community organizations and the university.
- Promote health literacy and health advocacy.

Community Assets and Needs

- Large inequalities in health status, literacy, and economic well-being with communities segregated by race and ethnicity.
- Active community and health organizations that advocate for health, education, and housing, and are eager to partner.
- 130 patients from six (6) community health centers ranked health and community information as their top choices but identified lack of access to computers, the Internet, and technology skills as significant barriers.
- Health centers welcome electronic resources for their providers and patients, and patients are enthusiastic to learn.

Principles of Outreach

- Everyone knows something about the Internet and everyone can learn.
- Adult learners require practical, usable information and skills taught in a respectful manner.
- Physical, not virtual, presence is essential.

Strategies

- Supplies health centers with resources, such as computers for patients and staff, licenses to medical databases for staff, a web site of health and community resources, biweekly visits, and hands-on classes sponsored by PIA.
- Takes health information where people work and live with a focus on community health centers.
- Makes health information connections with organizations and people with similar missions and values.
- Develops technology skills and awareness of health and community resources among staff members and people they serve.
- Teaches adult learners at Even Start, teen health promoters at Mary’s Center and the university.
- Promote health literacy and health advocacy.

Results

Over the course of four (4) years, Partners has:
- Made over 1,000 visits to introduce over 4,500 people to MedlinePlus and similar resources.
- Staffed over 30 exhibits and health fairs.
- Taught over 100 classes.
- Helped 5 community collaborators implement their own programs.
- Catalyzed the formation of Health Information Partners - HIPS.

Community health center staff responding to surveys report over 75 percent use scientific and consumer health resources:
- "We use health information in our clinic and a regular class with Partners on accessing health information in our diabetes classes.
- So many patients want to know in easy words their problems, and it is great to bring them health information that they understand.
- Clients reported after accessing information on the web they felt less anxious and more informed about their health. Some clients have used information from the web to initiate conversations from health providers, and it has driven some of their treatment strategies.
- It’s important to help guide users to reputable sites, and take an interest in what patients may be reading on the web.”

Community based focus groups and workshop evaluations reveal high interest among Latino parents, clients with HIV, and teens:
- "Use the Internet as my third opinion.
- I’m going to take this information to my family and colleagues.
- Teach us more about HIV.”

Lessons Learned

Successful outreach and training require:
- Frequent onsite presence and persistence over years.
- Integration within the organization’s mission and routines and relationships with staff members and clients.
- Involvement in regional health and related organizations.
- Inclusivity regarding people and diseases, and language that emphasizes unity and acceptance.
- Ability to work with people from different social classes and historical experiences.
- A social justice framework in which health information is a small but necessary component of overcoming inequality.

Challenges include:
- Integrating new information practices into daily life.
- Identifying resources useful for particular literacy levels and needs.
- Designing evaluations that capture our work and document long-term effects, such as behavioral and health status outcomes.
- Balancing administrative/research responsibilities with program implementation.
- Funding all program participants.

So Others Might Eat

- Serving homeless individuals with clinical, mental health, and substance use care.

Children’s Health Centers SE

- Serving children and teens in Wards 7 and 8.

Primary Care Coalition of Montgomery County, Md.

- Supporting the safety-net centers of Montgomery County.

Health Action Forum of Prince George’s County

- Building the safety-net in Prince George’s County.

DC Department of Health: Project WISH and Healthy Start

- Conducting outreach to prevent women’s cancers and infant mortality.

RIGHT, Inc.

- Developing housing opportunities for people with AIDS.

Family and Medical Counseling Service, Inc.

- Providing medical care, social services, and computer training for people with HIV and AIDS, and other conditions.

Health Services for Children

- Supporting families with children with special needs.

Metropolitan Washington Public Health Association

- Organizing to reduce health disparities.

UDC/State Education Agency, Adult Education

- Adult education and health literacy outreach on wheels.

Project of Intermediate Advocates (PIA)

- Peer educators taking health information to the community.

DC Public Library / Washington Highlands Library

- Health literacy classes and the Lifelong Learning Center for Health.

DC Area Health Education Center

- Health professional education for community service.

GWU School of Public Health and Health Services

- Prevention and community health promotion.

GWU Himmelstein Library

- Educating and equipping health professionals with information.

ISCOPES

- Partnering students with communities to promote health.

Unity Health Care and Community Health Centers

- Providing safety-net care.

MidAtlantic Public Health Training Center

- Developing skills of the public health and community based workforce.

La Clinica del Pueblo

- Serving Latino families with medical care and social services.

Major Outcome: Health Information Partners, HIPS

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