Connecting the Dots: Promoting Health Equity for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Populations

On December 3rd 2011, the NYU Center for the Study of Asian American Health (CSAAH), in partnership with the Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum (APIAHF), co-hosted the 6th Annual Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AA and NHPI) Health Conference at the NYU Farkas Auditorium. The conference was a great success, bringing together over 110 community, academic, and government experts within an agenda-setting structure to define recommendations to promote health equity for AA and NHPIs and to help support the US Department of Health and Human Services Plan for AA and NHPI Health.

Community, academic, and government leaders, including HHS Assistant Secretary for Health, Howard Koh, were recognized in an award ceremony for their tremendous contribution to improve AA and NHPI Health. Final recommendations will be disseminated to strategic leaders and policymakers of the federal government to advocate for the promotion of health equity for AA and NHPI communities.

Please see CSAAH’s website (http://asian-health.med.nyu.edu/) for conference resources, including the video streaming of our morning keynote panel with guest speakers: Dr. Rochelle Rollins, Director, Division of Policy and Data, Office of Minority Health, HHS; Sefa Aina, Commission Member, President’s Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders; Jeff Caballero, Executive Director, Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations; and Kathy Lim Ko, President & CEO, Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum, as well as links to panelists’ presentations.
NYU PRC Advocates for Increased Health Care Access and the Needs of Immigrants, Children, and Families

On February 13, 2012, the NYU PRC participated in the Third Annual Asian Pacific State Legislative Advocacy Day, which was sponsored by Assemblywoman Grace Meng and organized by the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF). Over 70 individuals from 44 organizations were in attendance, and meetings were held with over 25 elected and appointed officials to advocate for legislative and budget priorities that affect Asian Pacific American families.

NYU PRC Staff met with Assemblymembers Grace Meng and Guillermo Linares and State Senators Thomas Duane, Malcolm Smith, and Toby Ann Stavisky, sharing stories and information on the challenges faced by the communities with which we work, and highlight the use of evidence-based strategies and best practices to address health disparities. Assemblymember Linares, the former NYC Commissioner of Immigrant Affairs and a former taxi driver, was particularly interested in increasing South Asian taxi drivers’ access to affordable health care, while Senator Stavisky’s office expressed strong support for the CHW workforce and the work that they do.

In addition to these legislative meetings, a policy briefing on demographic changes and education challenges, hosted by Assemblywoman Meng, brought together over 30 state legislators who offered remarks in support of Asian Pacific American communities.

NYU NOPREN: Progress With Research Projects Designed to Impact the Ways New Yorkers Eat and Drink

The NYU Nutrition and Obesity Policy Research and Evaluation Network (NOPREN) project is evaluating a NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC DOHMH) initiative to increase access to drinking water in NYC elementary, middle, and high schools. This initiative placed “water jets” (cooled tap-water dispensers) in school cafeterias. Getting children accustomed to drinking water rather than high-calorie, sugary drinks may help to reduce childhood obesity. NOPREN is working with the NYC DOHMH to assess the impact of water jets on students’ water drinking and attitudes through observations, surveys, and interviews. Preliminary findings demonstrate that water jets almost tripled the proportion of observed drinking water during school lunch and significantly increased the proportion of students who reported they usually drink water at lunch. NOPREN is currently examining the impact of these changes on milk-drinking and other beverages, as well as perceptions about drinking water. Based on the data, the use of water jets in school cafeterias shows potential to increase water consumption in schools and perhaps influence students’ perceptions about beverage choices.

NYU NOPREN evaluates NYC menu labeling policy

NOPREN is also examining how New Yorkers use calorie information posted in chain restaurants. By law, any NYC restaurant that is part of a chain of 15 or more restaurants offering the same menu items must post the calories alongside the menu items. After preliminary findings that many low-income individuals infrequently use the posted calorie information to make food choices, NOPREN conducted a series of focus groups to find out why.

Focus group participants were primarily low-income residents from across NYC who frequently attended chain fast food restaurants. Many participants noticed calorie information on menus. However, most people discussed other influences on their decision-making processes than calorie information because other factors influenced their decisions instead. Often, their choices were guided by individual factors like preference for certain foods, prior familiarity with the menu, and degree of hunger. Some participants cited environmental factors that guided their food choice like price constraints, lack of time to take the calories into account, and an overall lack of clarity or meaning of the calorie counts.

The focus group demonstrated that food choice is a complex phenomenon and external factors often took priority over a consideration of an item’s calories. “Who cares about calories if you want it?” one female participant noted. On the other hand, a few participants reported that they really used and appreciated the calorie labels. One female participant said: “Well, the other day it stopped me from eating. "like, my whole 2000 calories in one sitting, so that was great." There is no one-size-fits-all solution to encourage healthy eating, but despite initial findings that calorie labels are not being maximized, NOPREN’s discussions with groups of NYC residents suggest that with some revisions to clarify the calorie labels and decrease other barriers to use, menu labeling may in fact have promise.

NOPREN is led by Brian Elbel, PhD and Courtney Abrams, MA, in conjunction with academic partners at the NYU School of Medicine, College of Nursing, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development, and the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service.
NYU PRC Actively Involved with the American Public Health Association

2012 APHA PUBLICATIONS

The NYU PRC has an article, collaboratively co-authored by a group of community and academic partners, accepted for publication in the American Journal of Public Health (AJPH). The article, titled “Lessons Learned from a Community-Academic Initiative (CAI): The Development of a Core Competency-Based Training for CAI-Community Health Workers,” describes the development, implementation, and evaluation of the NYU PRC’s CHW Training Program. It will be published in the July 2012 print issue of the journal.

NYU PRC Investigators and community partners also have a publication in press titled, “Understanding Barriers to and Facilitators of Diabetes Control and Prevention in the New York City Bangladeshi Community: A Mixed Methods Approach.” Additionally, NYU PRC Post-Doctoral Fellow, Shijian Li, PhD also has an article, titled “Social Capital and Smoking Among Asian American Men: An Exploratory Study,” examining dimensions of social networks in association with smoking behavior among a sample of Asian American men who participated in the National Latino and Asian American Survey from 2002 to 2003. Both articles will be published online in March 2012.

APHA ANNUAL MEETING

The NYU PRC had a strong presence at the APHA Annual Meeting, which took place in Washington, DC from October 27-31, 2011. Faculty, staff, community partners, and interns conducted a total of 10 oral, 7 poster, 1 panel, and 4 roundtable presentations.

Community Partner and Student Spotlight: The CHW Network of NYC and Ji Eun Chang

On October 25 2011, the Community Health Worker Network (CHW) of New York City released a set of recommendations on advancing the CHW workforce in New York State. The recommendations were developed in collaboration with the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, the New York State Health Foundation, CHWs and other stakeholders statewide, which seek to establish a standard scope of practice, develop training standards and a credentialing process, and identify stable financing streams and reimbursement mechanisms for CHWs.

NYU PRC Fellow Ji Eun Chang will be working closely with the CHW Network to advance the implementation of these recommendations. Ji Eun is a doctoral student at the Wagner School of Public Service at New York University, where she studies public policy and management and the intersection of the two fields. She also works as a research assistant and teaching colleague at NYU, and is involved in both qualitative and quantitative research. Prior to starting the program, Ji Eun was a policy analyst at the District of Columbia Department of Human Services. She has a background working in a variety of arenas in the nonprofit, media, private, and public sectors and was also an academic associate with Carnegie Mellon University, through which she worked on projects evaluating state-level programs in South Australia. Ji Eun holds an MS in public policy and management from Carnegie Mellon University and a BA in economics from the University of California at Berkeley.

Rucha Kavathe (second from right) leads community members of all ages in a group exercise

Checking in with a PRC Community Health Worker, Rucha Kavathe

We checked-in with Rucha Kavathe, Project RICE CHW based at UNITED SIKHS, about her experiences in providing health outreach and education in the Sikh community in Richmond Hill, Queens.

Rucha, is diabetes prevention an important issue in the Sikh American community?

Definitely. South Asians have a higher risk of getting diabetes, and 1 out of 3 Asian Indians in the US are pre-diabetic. Results from community health surveys we conducted with 171 Sikhs in Richmond Hill in 2010 confirmed what many of us know anecdotally: rates of chronic disease and risk factors are high in our community. Approximately 40% of those surveyed were overweight and an additional 44% were obese, according to Asian BMI standard measurements. Only 28% reported engaging in physical activity for the recommended amount of 150 minutes per week. At the same time, 64% of those surveyed did not have any form of health insurance and only 48% had seen a doctor in the past year for a regular check-up or physical.

What have you learned about being a CHW since you started working with Project RICE?

As a CHW, I try to encourage people in our community to make preventative health a priority, rather than waiting until they have developed a serious health problem. One of the greatest lessons I have learned is to work with people where they’re at, in a way that is meaningful and feasible for them. We set health goals together in a way that they think is possible for them to reach. Often these are small steps towards major lifestyle changes, but these small steps are the first they take in prioritizing their own health in their everyday lives. It is my hope for each of the Project RICE participants to be advocates of their own health as well as join us in advocating for the health of the community.

Unique opportunities and the road ahead

I’ve also learned the importance of working closely with the gurdwaras (Sikh houses of worship), which are at the heart of the community, and where Sikhs share many meals together. This tradition of community meals, called langar, is central to the Sikh beliefs of equality and service, and an integral part of the Sikh faith. We have been fortunate to have the support of the Sikh Cultural Society, Inc., a well-established gurdwara in the community, where we held two cooking demonstrations to show community members how to make (continued on pg 5)
Project RICE Celebrates the Achievements of the First Graduating Class

Since May 2011, the NYU PRC, in collaboration with Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York (KCS), have been offering NYC Koreans the opportunity to learn how to lead healthier lives through Project RICE. Christina Choi, a trained Community Health Worker (CHW) at KCS, led a total of 30 group education workshops on health promotion and chronic disease prevention, and followed-up with participants to reinforce key messages and set goals aligned with the curriculum.

The workshops covered a range of topics, including nutrition, physical activity, stress management, diabetes and chronic disease prevention, and health care access. All workshop materials are culturally-tailored and were developed in partnership with KCS and other partners in the Korean community. According to Ms. Choi, “It was amazing to see a change in the lives of the participants, who have reported losing weight, eating healthier and also finding a supportive environment to talk about the challenges of staying active and managing stress.”

The first group of 48 Project RICE participants completed the program in November 2011. Their achievements were celebrated at a graduation ceremony on November 19th, in Flushing, where they were congratulated by NYS Assemblymember Grace Meng.

Project RICE graduates shared their experiences with the program, and their comments highlighted the importance of this work in raising awareness and improving access to health for the NYC Korean community:

- “Three months ago, I developed some health problems but I couldn’t go to any of the hospitals because I had no insurance. I was able to get free screening services from KCS as well as learn more about diabetes and other helpful tips about my health, and I would like to thank them for this.”
  – Female participant
- “I didn’t pay much attention in the past, but through this program, I now am more conscious of nutrition labeling and my level of activity. It doesn’t take much effort for you to get decent exercise. Something that doesn’t cost money, such as walking at a brisk pace for 10-15 minutes or indoor exercises—I learned that just doing these will be effective.”
  – Male participant

Project RICE is currently recruiting participants for the next round of workshops, scheduled to begin in May 2012.

Men’s Health Initiative: 10,000 Screenings, 797 Eligible Men Recruited

The NYU Comparative Effectiveness Research program, also called the NYU Men’s Health Initiative, builds on two existing research projects to assess community-based approaches to treating hypertension and increasing colorectal cancer screening rates among older Black men. The program team, including partnerships with churches, mosques, soup kitchens, religious organization, barbershops and other community-based organizations, has now recruited 797 eligible men for the two research studies! At their recruitment events over the past year, the team has provided free blood pressure screening and counseling for close to 10,000 men and women in all five boroughs of New York City. To find future recruitment events, read more about the projects, or learn about how you can get involved, visit our website at www.themenshealthinitiative.com.

Emerging Research on Health Behaviors in Russian Immigrants

NYC’s 2010 Community Health Survey indicated a colonoscopy screening rate of 55.7% for the Russian speaking community, which is lower than the city-wide average screening rate of 67.5%. Since research about prevention in this population is limited, there is a need to better understand the determinants that contribute to low screening rates. Evidence suggests that the Russian immigrants, who are predominantly in New York City, also have poor health behaviors related to cancer and other chronic diseases such as high smoking and obesity rates. They also rarely saw a doctor even when they had health insurance.

The NYU School of Medicine’s Institute for Community Health and Research is partnering with the NYC DOHMH’s Cancer Prevention and Control Program to investigate these issues through an initiative funded by the New York State Cancer Services Program. We will be speaking with key leaders and members of the Russian-speaking community to better understand barriers and facilitators to colonoscopy screenings and to preventive behaviors in general so that we may then address these barriers in future activities. If you are interested in learning more about our efforts, please contact Ephraim Shapiro at ephraim.shapiro@nyumc.org.
Checking in with a PRC Community Health Worker, Rucha Kavathe
(continued from pg 3)

healthier versions of popular Sikh-Punjabi dishes. Those who came for the community meal were able to taste the healthier dishes and take recipes to try at home. This provides a unique opportunity to not only address individual health concerns, but also the culture of food and physical activity of the entire community that congregates here. I hope to continue to work with the gurdwaras so they are more involved in spreading the word of awareness and prevention.

The PRC, in collaboration with the Community Health Worker Network of New York State and the Charles B. Wang Community Health Center, trained 46 community health workers (CHWs) in 2010 and 2011. The 105-hour training included instruction in communication, counseling, service coordination, capacity-building, advocacy, research, and disease prevention and management.

Annual 2012 Winter/Spring Intern Presentations

On February 23 2012, our wonderful and dedicated interns presented their work at the Annual NYU PRC Winter/Spring Intern Presentations event. Project RICE intern Su Hyun Park and Clara Park presented on the challenges and successes of implementing a diabetes prevention CHW intervention in the New York City Korean American community. B Free CEED intern Jooyoung Cha presented results from a descriptive study examining hepatitis B awareness and knowledge among South Asian taxi drivers, which was done in partnership with the New York Taxi Worker’s Alliance, a Legacy pilot project grantee.

On December 2nd 2011, the NYU Center for the Study of Asian American Health (CSAAH) held the second Community-Empowered Research Training (CERT). A collaboration of the NYU CSAAH and the NYU PRC, CERT is an academic-community partnership dedicated to strengthening community leadership in research. The one-day training and networking event was attended by over 40 senior leaders and management staff of community-based organizations from across the US.

Sessions included a mock grant review exercise, presentations on successful community-engaged research projects by community leaders, and a panel on federal public health initiatives, including the Community Transformation Grants. Speakers included Roger Hayes, Assistant Commissioner of the East & Central Harlem District Public Health Office, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and Brenda Henry, Program Officer of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The next CERT workshop is scheduled for Spring 2012. Educational videos and PowerPoint presentations from past workshops and webinars can now be viewed on the CSAAH website: http://asian-health.med.nyu.edu/training-education/community-empowered-research-training-cert.

We acknowledge the partners involved in the collaborative development of CERT including: the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum, the Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations, the B Free CEED: National Center of Excellence in the Elimination of Hepatitis B Disparities, the NYU Center for the Study of Asian American Health (CSAAH), the Charles B. Wang Community Health Center, the National Advisory Committee on Research Development, the NYU Health Promotion and Prevention Research Center (PRC), the NYU-HHC Clinical and Translational Science Institute, and the NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development.

For more information and updates please visit our website: http://prevention-research.med.nyu.edu