Community members trained to help boost cancer screenings among Hmong women

**Description:** This project developed a lay health education/community health worker (CHW) model and curriculum to address breast and cervical cancer disparities and improve cancer health outcomes among Hmong women.

**Relevance:** Cancer is the leading cause of mortality for Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women in the United States. AAPI women also have the lowest cancer screening rates of any ethnic group. Of the 50-plus AAPI groups in the United States, the Hmong people have some of the worst cancer screening rates and health outcomes. Wisconsin has the third largest population of Hmong refugees in the United States; approximately one-quarter live in the Milwaukee area. While Wisconsin does not separately report cancer data for the Hmong, AAPI women generally demonstrate the highest incidence and mortality of cervical cancer compared to any other ethnic group.

**Results:** The community and academic partners created a culturally appropriate curriculum and trained seven Hmong women as lay community health workers. These women conducted eight educational workshops, reaching 94 Hmong women in the Milwaukee community. The team also developed a culturally appropriate community health mentor model and curriculum and trained two female Hmong cancer survivors as mentors.

In an attempt to identify newly diagnosed breast and cervical cancer patients, the partners built new relationships with Milwaukee-based clinics and health centers that serve Hmong families. They created a secure online referral form for use by health care providers. Due to several factors, the partners were unable to recruit participants for the project. The main challenges were the low number of newly diagnosed Hmong breast and cervical cancer patients in the Milwaukee area, trust issues on the part of Hmong women toward Western medicine and discomfort in talking about cancer.

Despite these obstacles, the project capitalized on unexpected opportunities. The partners developed and implemented two large educational events that allowed them to partner with other Hmong organizations, increasing the project’s visibility and reach. One of the events grew from the increasing recognition of men in encouraging and supporting Hmong women in their decisions to seek breast and cervical cancer screening.

This pilot project demonstrated that community-based workshops led by lay health educators can positively affect knowledge and attitudes toward cancer screening, which should lead to earlier cancer detection and better health outcomes. The training programs and curricula also can be implemented in other Hmong communities throughout the state, thus increasing the project’s impact.

The partners intend to use their findings and lessons learned for a larger-scale implementation of the CHW and community health mentor programs. They believe there is a great need for this service, but that more education and outreach is needed before Hmong cancer patients will feel comfortable reaching out for mentoring services.

**KEY INFORMATION**

**Grantee:** Milwaukee Consortium for Hmong Health, Beth R. Peterman

**Grant Title:** Healthy Hmong Women (Poj Niam Hmong Kev Noj Qab Haus Huv): Training Lay Health Educators to Address Hmong Cancer Health Disparities

**Academic Partner:** Shannon Sparks, UW-Madison, School of Human Ecology

**Dates:** July 1, 2011 – June 30, 2013

**Amount:** $50,000

**Program:** Community-Academic Partnership

**Project ID:** 2007