Latino Lay Health Advisors: A Coalition Initiative

The purpose of the project, “Latino Lay Health Advisors: A Coalition Initiative,” is to educate the Latino community to improve medical literacy and avoid overutilization of acute care settings, such as emergency rooms. Focus areas for the grant are diabetes, heart disease, obesity and other related health problems as well as health care access. The grant was awarded by the N.C. Health and Wellness Trust Fund as part of one of its major health initiatives, the Eliminating Health Disparities Initiative. Dr. Jorge Calles-Escandón, M.D., is an associate professor of internal medicine and principal investigator of the LHA project.

Designed in conjunction with the Department of Chaplaincy and Pastoral Education at Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center, the project aims to empower key leaders in Latino religious communities to become health educators. Religious leaders were chosen because a significant percentage of the Latino population participates in religious services and has an ingrained respect for religious figures. The candidates trained as lay health advisors (LHAs) will be identified by each of the partner denominations or ministries of this project. They will receive a total of 60 hours of training over three months at Wake Forest University School of Medicine.

A structured curriculum will be created to educate the LHAs and provide them with the tools necessary to provide health education in the language and style most suitable to their communities. The curriculum will present information about the most prevalent diseases affecting the state’s Latino population and key issues related to the health care system in the United States such as access, utilization of the system and preventative medicine issues. Major subjects covered by the curriculum include obesity, hypertension, dyslipidemia (overproduction or deficiency of lipids in the blood), Type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Faculty and students at the School of Medicine will support these efforts by providing basic medical services for screening and testing of common diseases that affect Latinos.

Partner congregations will be asked to nominate 2-3 candidates (2 +1 backup) to be trained as Lay Health Advisors as well as provide space for the LHAs to conduct the education sessions for each church. We would also ask for a representative of each partner church to participate in our sustainability board, which will help us develop ways of continuing to support the program after the three years of grant funding is complete.

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