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Health disparities and medical research focus of OHSSWA conference

By *Arooj Ashraf, La Prensa Correspondent*

Ohio Hispanic Social Service Workers Association (OHSSWA) held their 10th annual conference with main focus on Health Disparities, "Opening Paths towards the Horizon in Good Health" on April 14, 2012. More than 80 adults and children attended, participating in health workshops, met with local agencies dedicated to improving health, access and information.



Nereida Díaz, OHSSWA president, said the organization is counting its mission to educating and advocating for the community in its plight for better health and access. *Iris Cartagena* led *Zumba Sessions*, and organizations hosted information tables. Various workshops were held to address health concerns such as diabetes, epileptic seizures, and the importance of participating in medical research.

Kari Colón-Zimmermann, research assistant at *Case Western Reserve University*, shared the findings from her two-year research on minority health disparities, perceptions, and attitudes of Latino, African-American, Asian, and Caucasian. The research organized 13 focus groups, and interviewed 120 participants and analyzed the results that will be published within the year.

Colón-Zimmermann said the results confirmed common perceptions, such as: patients who work with a navigator or translator tend to fare better in treatments. She said as a result *CareSource*, the largest healthcare provider in Ohio and a sponsor of the OHSSWA conference, created a program to train patient navigators.

Colón-Zimmermann said participants were very vocal about their genetic history and expressed a desire to participate in studies that will benefit their health, improve access to care. "There is a huge sense of being marginalized," within minority communities, and the economically disadvantaged.

The research is documented by photos taken by *Esperanza Inc.* students and residents of the *Helen S. Brown Senior Citizen Center*. Colón-Zimmermann notes the youth expressed more spirituality compared to seniors who depicted more Biblical references. The research also noted cultural perceptions that often hinder understanding, prevention, and treatment of diseases.

Mary Ellen Lawless, research assistant at *MetroHealth*, said including diverse participants in medical research is important for seeking answers to wide spectrum of questions. "Many people are afraid to be guinea pigs in medical research but they also have rights and should understand they are equal partners and have a choice to participate," she said. During her workshop presented on behalf of *Clinical and Transitional Science Collaborative*, Lawless reviewed participant's rights and protection.

She said medical studies take an average of 17 years to complete and be implemented and the main reason is the lack of participants. In an effort to facilitate this CTSC has created Research Match that registers participants and connects them with researchers based on need. Cleveland Clinic, MetroHealth, and University Hospital Case Medical Center and Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine are participating members. Lawless said the most common method for spreading the word about studies being conducted is through flyers.

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Lawless estimates there are around 1,500 studies being conducted in the Greater Cleveland area, one of which for people with mental illness and diabetes. Study participant will receive psychological assessments, answers questionnaires about their health, be compensated for their assessment visits, and be randomly selected to participate in a 12-week education intervention on managing their illness.

More information can be obtained by calling 1-888-819-0004.

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