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Collaboration addresses information and education needs of an urban public health workforce*

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INTRODUCTION

Addressing the health information needs of diverse, multiethnic, and multilingual communities can be both a challenge and an opportunity for libraries. The Vera P. Shiffman Medical Library at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, is the only academic medical library in the Detroit area open to the public. The library provides services to many communities in southeastern Michigan. The diverse geographic area served by the library includes the nation's highest concentration of Arab Americans [1]. A review of the literature reveals that limited research has addressed how libraries can meet the health information needs of this target community [2]. An understanding of the health information needs of Arab Americans in Michigan, and in the United States, will be increasingly important for libraries responsible for providing library services for and developing resources to meet the needs of Arab American health consumers and to improve the quality of information available to health professionals serving these communities.

Chief among the concerns of the library was to increase the relevance and usability of information for health professionals providing health-related services to local Arab, Muslim, and Chaldean American communities in Michigan. A key strategy of this initiative was to establish relationships with organizations that served this target population. The Urban Health Partners program, begun in 2003 and continuing through the present, was launched by establishing partnerships with a health department and a community-based organization serving these communities. The program described here is an important building block for achieving a greater understanding of how information is needed and used in different settings and by different groups of people.

TARGET POPULATION AND SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

The Arab American population in Michigan is estimated at 490,000 [3]. In addition, Arab Americans are the third largest and fastest growing minority group in the state of Michigan with a great majority of this population clustered in Wayne County in southeastern

Michigan (the location of the academic medical library) [4]. Arabs have cited family unification, economic advancement, and escape from the conflicts in the Middle East among their reasons for arrival in this region [1]. The largest number of new Arab immigrants to Michigan came from Iraq, followed by Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and Egypt [1]. Identifying community partners who primarily interact with and provide services to targeted communities was the initial challenge for the library.

PARTNERS

Outreach can be instrumental to facilitating a connection between a target audience and needed services [5]. Therefore, a critical first step was to gain a better understanding of the information and education needs of the local public health workforce serving primarily minority and ethnic communities in southeastern Michigan.

Library staff employed several techniques to identify possible partners who could assist with this process. Project staff attended and participated in a variety of statewide health fairs and conferences (Table 1). These activities provided staff with an increased knowledge of common diseases and health issues in the Arab American community and opportunities to network with key community leaders and stakeholders. In addition, using public telephone directories, scanning local Arab-English newspapers, and checking local Websites provided an overview of community resources.

The library established partnerships with the Wayne County Department of Public Health and the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services, a community-based organization primarily serving local Arab American communities. Collaboration with these groups was essential in building community trust, gaining a deeper understanding of information needs and health concerns, and identifying collaborative ways of addressing barriers to the use of information in different public health settings.

INTERVENTIONS

The information and training needs of public health professionals who serve the target population in southeastern Michigan were assessed through multiple approaches including semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, feedback obtained at local and state health fairs and conferences, and an evaluation form distributed at the end of library workshops at the two partnering public health organizations (Table 2).

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A supplemental appendix is available with the online version of this journal.

Table 1
Health fairs and community events

- Health Issues in the Arab American Community Conference (2003 and 2006)
- Symposium for Refugees and Victims of Torture (2004)
- Project Saha Transcultural Health Fair (2004)
- American Arab Nurses Association's "Building Cultural Bridges in Health Care" Conference (2005)
- Michigan Public Health Conference (2005)
- National Arab American Medical Association Conference (2006)

Information and training

During interviews with key leaders at partnering organizations, "searching the medical literature" was requested as an initial training topic for staff. The project team developed workshops lasting two hours that detail the use of online resources such as PubMed, MedlinePlus, and Loansome Doc to targeted members of the public health community. Searching examples that reflected key program areas at partnering agencies were integrated into the workshops. Topics of interest included prevention of lead poisoning, childhood immunization, and diabetes. The workshops also provided instruction for accessing the library's reference and document delivery services.

In response to the workshop evaluations (further described in the "Evaluation" section), customized on-site training was further developed and refined for staff at partnering public health organizations to increase awareness of and facilitate access to relevant public health information and data resources. To date, the Urban Health Partners program has delivered thirty workshops for staff at both organizations.

On-site training workshop topics included locating public health data resources, evaluating health information, and finding funding opportunities. Feedback from workshop participants also indicated the desire for specific software training, such as spreadsheet and presentation software. Additional training on statistical software and resources for emerging and infectious diseases was also requested. In particular, locating resources with reliable and timely information about avian influenza and West Nile virus was suggested. Overall, feedback from workshop participants provided direction and enabled the library to respond to the local public health workforce through the development of a variety of services, resources, and training interventions.

Resource development

Library staff also became aware of difficulties in locating culturally meaningful health information for targeted communities, including health information in Arabic, while attending community health fairs. At these fairs, librarians were asked for assistance in locating information about Ramadan and fasting, as well as other health information materials in Arabic. Existing online materials in Arabic were very limited and difficult to locate; therefore, these concerns generated the idea of establishing an easy-to-use online collection of culturally relevant and meaningful health infor-

Table 2
Key approaches for developing an understanding of diverse user communities

- Consulted public telephone directories, scanned local Arab-English newspapers, and checked local Websites to identify community assets
- Attended and participated in health fairs and community events
- Conducted semi-structured interviews with key community leaders and stakeholders
- Developed on-site training and distributed workshop evaluations
- Analyzed feedback from workshop participants to identify follow-up opportunities

mation that would be accessible to community members as well as health providers serving this underserved population. To accomplish this, library staff developed an online collection of organized electronic consumer health materials in Arabic that addressed relevant health issues for local Arab populations [2].

EVALUATION

Interviews with key community leaders, feedback from the training workshops, and participation in local events illuminated various information needs and allowed the library to be responsive in offering new services and training to support the targeted local public health community. At the conclusion of each training workshop, an end-of-class evaluation form was distributed to help ascertain whether or not the "searching the medical literature" training session met staff needs and to identify follow-up training opportunities. The workshop evaluation form (Appendix) was adapted from *Measuring the Difference* [6] and distributed to individual public health workers after they attended initial workshops over a nine-month period in 2005. Table 3 illustrates the job functions of the public health workers who attended the workshops. Each individual in attendance at a training workshop completed the workshop evaluation form. Respondents (n = 105) indicated that hands-on practice and the expertise of library staff were among the most useful aspects of the training.

All participants indicated that they would recommend attending a workshop provided by the Urban Health Partners program to their coworkers. In addition, when asked to indicate *all* types of information

Table 3
Distribution of public health staff by job function (n = 98*)

Job	Number of respondents (%)
Administrator/coordinator	40 (40.8)
Nurse	16 (16.3)
Physician	8 (8.2)
Social worker/counselor	7 (7.1)
Clerical	6 (6.1)
Educator	4 (4.1)
Psychologist	3 (3.1)
Dietician/nutritionist	2 (2.0)
Case manager	1 (1.0)
Other	11 (11.2)
Total	98 (99.9)

* Not all 105 respondents noted job category.

Table 4

Type of information needed to support work and research (n = 105)

Type of information	Number of respondents (%)
Health statistics	68 (64.8)
Health status indicators	47 (44.8)
Consumer/patient information	44 (41.9)
Funding sources	42 (40.0)
Medical research	38 (36.2)
Federal/state legislation	35 (33.3)
Policy issues	34 (32.4)
Drug information	20 (19.0)

needed to support their work and research, public health workers reported that health statistics were a priority, followed by health status indicators, consumer and patient information, funding information, medical research, and federal and state legislative information (Table 4). These findings agreed with findings of other reports of public health information needs [5, 7].

Future evaluation activities include an analysis of workshop feedback to identify additional follow-up opportunities. An ongoing, iterative approach will include follow-up interviews with stakeholders and monitoring usage of the project Website. In addition, project staff recognize the importance of sustaining ongoing communication and providing regular updates to community organizations, English and Arabic media, and local elected officials regarding the progress of initiatives and emphasizing the importance or benefit to the community.

RESULTS

This initiative illustrates a successful outreach program that addresses the needs of the local public health community. Cooperation, commitment, community endorsement, and adequate funds allow the provision of access to health information, the production and dissemination of culturally meaningful health information materials, and the extension of library training opportunities to public health practitioners. One lesson learned is that sustainable community partnerships can be achieved by analyzing and understanding the assets of potential partners so that a shared community initiative can be sustained. The library's relationship with a community partner serving the Arab American community in Dearborn, Michigan, a city where roughly one-third of the population reports some Arab heritage [1], was a valuable asset and provided guidance for many activities including planning and publicity. Furthermore, feedback from workshop participants illuminated additional information and education needs of staff at partnering public health settings.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Urban Health Partners program at Wayne State University can serve as a model for those interested in

developing urban health and public health information outreach programs through active and engaged community partnerships. Project staff continues to follow up with training opportunities identified by workshop participants. Future plans also include working with a statewide library association to promote the availability of Arabic materials to public librarians, and project staff is actively seeking opportunities to partner with public libraries and other community groups to collaboratively expand the project's reach to neighboring communities.

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