Community Workers’ Understanding of Barriers to Oral Health Care for Latinos

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Abstract

Background: Preventable oral diseases affect Latinos more than other populations in the United States. This has increased the engagement of promotora in health promotion activities in these communities.

Objective: The purpose of this study was to understand the barriers to oral health care for Latinos in Eastern North Carolina, as explained by the promotora of AMEXCAN.

Methods: Focus groups were conducted in Spanish, following a semi-structured interview guide, to assess the promotora’s perception of the problems and solutions to receiving care. The qualitative data were analyzed for themes using conventional content analysis methods.

Results: Promotora’s explanations of barriers to dental care were categorized under the following themes: scheduling, accessing care, the haves and the have-nots, oral health care perceptions, experiences, and requirements.

Discussion: Findings revealed there are enabling and pre-disposing factors that influence Latinos’ dental access. Solutions lie not only in the hands of the individuals but in the care providers as well. The research provides insights into how to address problems of dental care access for Latinos.

Introduction

The prevalence of preventable oral diseases, such as caries, remains high in the U.S. despite gaining new knowledge. These diseases disproportionately affect adults and children in the rapidly increasing Hispanic/Latino populations.

• Lugo et al. found that 65% of Hispanics reported having one or more dental problems in the past year compared to 53% of the general population.

• Cost, lack of insurance, scheduling issues, and fear are some of the common contributors in the barriers to accessing care.1

The use of promotora de salud (trained educators from the community) have been shown to be effective in inducing health behavior changes in minority populations. They accomplish this by tapping into the social support networks of Latino communities and providing aid where there is lack of knowledge.2

• Hoeff et al. used promotoras in an educational program on children’s oral health and they were rated as highly effective by the parents.3

Objective: Although research has evaluated the efficacy of promotora-lead health interventions, they lack an in-depth analysis of the promotora’s views of the specific challenges in their communities. This study seeks to understand barriers to accessing oral care for the Latino population in Eastern North Carolina, from the perspective of the promotora.

Methods

Study population:
• A sample size of 20 participants.

• Time as a promotora ranged from just starting to 4 years.

Inclusion criteria: Must be Latino/Hispanic and serving as a promotora with the Association of Mexicans in North Carolina (AMEXCAN).

Focus Group:
• Recruited based on the relationship with AMEXCAN.

• AMEXCAN center and Beaufort County Community College.

• Semi-structured 90-minute group interview with 11 open-ended questions.

• $20 gift certificate compensation.

Results

Data analysis:
• Notes from two note-takers and a facilitator were translated from Spanish and merged into an electronic document for group discussion.

• Notes were read individually by three analysts who each developed potential codes. These were compared among the analysts to produce a mutually agreed upon code list, which was applied to the text.

• Themes were described based on conventional content analysis, where insights emerge inductively from the data.

• Within-case analysis was used for examination of notes recorded within each single focus group.

• Cross-case analysis was used to compare results across multiple focus groups.

• Themes were organized based on the individual determinants of the health service utilization model by Anderson and Newman.4

Discussion

• The barriers to accessing dental care as described by the promotora/ community workers in Eastern North Carolina can be grouped into the six themes displayed in figure 1.

• The themes are categorized based on the model of health service utilization by Anderson and Newman.4

• Enabling factors relate to organization in the healthcare system and how services are made available to individuals.

• Predisposing factors relate to social structure and cultural beliefs.

• They cause differences between individuals that affect their inclination to utilize services.

• Cost/insurance, prioritizing work, and only going during times of extreme need lead to intense discussion among the promotoras.

• Responses show that most solutions lie in the hands of the health care providers.

Limitations

• The effect of a group setting on individual responses (i.e. feeling more pressure to agree with the majority)

• No information on nonverbal cues

• Small sample size

Significance

• Knowledge gained from this study will be useful when creating dental care programs that target the Latino population.

• Future research will explore barriers that parents experience in receiving care for their children.

References


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Figure 1. Themes and Solutions for Barriers to Accessing Dental Care