

Executive Summary

The arrival of greater numbers of Chinese immigrants in the Philadelphia metropolitan area has resulted in some unique challenges for health care workers and their Chinese patients. Cultural and language differences as well as a lack of understanding of the American health care system have kept the immigrants from receiving much needed health care and health education. In an attempt to overcome this problem, Thomas Jefferson University created the Chinese Health Information Center. The center does not provide direct health care services. Rather, it serves as a liaison between the Chinese community and Philadelphia health care providers. Offering translation services, educational programs, a health information hotline, screening, and assistance with social services, the center has bridged the gap and has assisted thousands of members of the Chinese community in obtaining health care and health information.

Organization Size: 720 beds

Program/Initiative Description

Chinese Health Information Center: With Chinese immigrants numbering between 50,000 and 60,000 in the greater Philadelphia area, the need for an organization to bridge the language and cultural barriers between the immigrants and the health care community was great. Taking the initiative was the Thomas Jefferson University Hospital. It created the "Chinese Health Information Center." The center does not provide direct services to patients. Rather, it provides assistance to the Chinese speaking community that improves their access to health care.

As the name implies, the primary aim of the center is to provide information. Most of the immigrants lack the language skills to communicate with mostly English speaking physicians. They are generally unfamiliar with the American health care system and are unaware of social benefits and assistance programs available to them such as Medicaid and Medicare. The center has implemented several programs to ensure these barriers are overcome. The most widely utilized program at the center is the health line. The health line operates from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and is staffed by employees who are bilingual and have a nursing background. The Chinese community is able to call in and receive answers to their health questions and referrals for any necessary treatment.

The center also employs two full-time interpreters. The interpreters are available to assist in arranging appointments with physicians and will go to the

appointment at the patient's request. There are a total of eight full-time staff, four part-time staff, and about ten regular volunteers.

To address a lack of understanding of public benefits programs, the center hired a social worker. Many patients take advantage of this program since they would otherwise have difficulty navigating the process on their own. The social worker is able to provide information about available benefits and assist in the application process. Patients are encouraged to apply for insurance and other benefits programs.

The most recent program began last year and focuses on community health screening. After receiving a grant, the center began screening for osteoporosis, conducting mammograms, and testing for Hepatitis B. In 2003, the center conducted 481 mammogram screenings (women 40 and above), 689 osteoporosis screenings (women 40 and above), and 468 Hepatitis B screenings (all age groups and both genders). Approximately 60 percent of women screened for osteoporosis and 30 percent of women receiving mammograms are found to be in need of treatment or re-screening. To ensure the women receive the care, the center follows up with the patients through letters and phone calls and provides referrals.

Health care information is also distributed through a partnership with the Chinese newspaper. In 2003, the center published 12 health-related articles in a free newspaper weekly that is widely read by the Chinese immigrant community. Twelve more health-related articles are scheduled for publication in 2004.

Establishment of Program/Initiative: 1998

Racial or Ethnic Disparities Problem the Program/Initiative Was Designed to Address: Inadequate health care received by the community's Chinese immigrants because of language, cultural, and economic barriers

Major Objectives

- Improve access to health care for the Chinese community
- Provide translation and referral services
- Assist Chinese immigrants in the assimilation process with respect to health care
- Ensure that language, cultural, and economic barriers do not stand in the way of necessary health care
- Initiate screening programs for osteoporosis, breast cancer, and Hepatitis B

Significant Results

- Last year alone, more than 10,000 phone calls to the health line were answered, 2,300 received face-to-face interpretation services, and 880 consulted with the social worker.

- Since beginning the screening programs, 689 women have been screened for osteoporosis, 481 women have received mammograms, and 468 patients have been tested for Hepatitis B.

External Partners in the Program/Initiative

- American Cancer Society
- Alzheimer's Association
- ATECAR, Center for Asian Health, Temple University
- Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
- ChildLink, Philadelphia Health Management Corporation
- Chinatown Pediatric Services
- City of Philadelphia, Department of Public Health
- Community Legal Services
- Drexel University School of Public Health
- Hall-Mercer Community Health & Retardation Center
- Hepatitis B Foundation
- Philadelphia Corporation for Aging
- Social Security Administration
- Temple University, Department of Public Health
- University of Pennsylvania, Asian American Studies Program
- U.S. Office of Minority Health, Region III
- Local Chinese churches
- Local Chinese community organizations
- Local Chinese newspapers
- Local insurance companies
- Local schools

Limitations or Problems Encountered: Ability to continue funding the program after the current grant ends in summer 2004

Estimated Cost of the Program, To Date: \$ 800,000 (August 2002-December 2003)

Advice to Other Organizations That May Want to Start a Similar Program

- Be patient; it takes time to build a good reputation.
- Assemble a dedicated staff, either employed or volunteer; familiar faces will build trust with the community.
- Make sure you are in touch with the needs of the community.
- Connect with the community through participation in local events and fundraisers.
- Vision and organization are key.

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