

## Overcoming Cultural Barriers

Sponsor: Glendale Adventist Medical Center

Location: Glendale, CA

Hearts N' Health dates to 1992 when Glendale Adventist Medical Center and the Armenian American Medical Society sponsored a health fair. Subsequent fairs and health screenings pinpointed the need for better interventions. "We'd see the same people coming back year after year for testing, but they'd be in worse condition. There was a strong demand for access to services, but little impact on changing people's behavior," recalls Bruce Nelson, director of community services at Glendale Adventist. The Armenian community was mostly new immigrants whose lifestyles put them at risk, but who didn't see the connection between their behavior and health. Most also hadn't accessed the health care system.

Working with numerous Armenian-American organizations, Glendale Adventist quickly realized the situation demanded a new approach. First came lay health educators, 12 local Armenian women trained to teach peers about key health issues using specially developed materials written in Armenian, along with other visual teaching aids. The discussions, which occur in the homes of local Armenian women, reach more than 500 people each year.

In 2001, Hearts N' Health launched Healthy Families, hosted by a respected Armenian public health educator, which airs on a public access cable television and reaches 10,000 people a week. The program's call-in line now receives more than 70 calls per show. Based on its success, Hearts N' Health started hosting quarterly "lifestyle impact events" tied to Healthy Families' program content. During 2002, Healthy Families began conducting prescreening questionnaires on-air prior to the lifestyle impact events to identify people most at risk. That resulted in the diagnosis of 26 diabetics from 34 who pretested as high-risk.

According to a random survey conducted in 2002, more than 90 percent of respondents indicated the in-home presentations and other program features had positively impacted their lifestyles. "It wouldn't have worked without our community partners. We were all driven by learning and evaluating as we went along, and then trying to be more responsive," Nelson says. "If we'd started with a planning committee and invested a lot up front, it probably wouldn't have been as successful."

Glendale Adventist is now using the Hearts N' Health model to reach other minority populations. "It's about knowing the epidemiology and organizing and rallying around individuals of the same ethnicity to solve problems versus just going to the community and saying this is what we're going to do for you," explains Scott Reiner, chief executive officer and president of Glendale Adventist. "If you create a unique model that works with the community, other organizations will join in."

**THE PROBLEM:** Local Armenian community members had lifestyles that put them at risk, but didn't see the connection between their behavior and health, and hadn't accessed the health care system.

**THE PLAYERS:** Armenian American Medical Society, Armenian Nursing Association, Armenian Relief Society, Glendale City Armenian Church, Armenian Advisory Council for Glendale Adventist, and Southern California Adventist Health Network.

**THE PLAN:** Work with the Armenian community to develop health education and screening programs that reflect its culture and lead people to make lifestyle changes and access the health care system.

**THE RESULTS:** 10,000 weekly viewers of cable health program; annual health fair attendance of more than 500; surveys indicating that more than 90 percent believe Hearts N' Health has positively impacted their lifestyles.

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