

Academic and Community Research Collaborations to Eliminate Health Disparities

A number of research projects at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill show the results of collaboration between academicians and community participants and are reflected in the presentations to be presented at the National Institute of Nursing Research State-of-the-Science Conference.* Titles include: *Collaborating with community participants in development of a conceptual basis for a successful research proposal* (presented by Dr. Chris McQuiston); *Partnering with Early Head Start to deliver interventions to reduce depressive symptoms in low-income and Latina mothers* (presented by Dr. Linda Beeber); and *Partnering with rural African American communities for research to eliminate health disparities* (presented by Dr. Jean Goepfenger). Common themes about community collaborations in research were evident in work with low-income and Latina mothers, Latinos and African Americans.

Each of the projects resulted from years of work with community participants and long standing commitments by the academicians. While developing relationships with voluntary associations, community leaders and *ad hoc* community groups, the projects' teams were diligent in applying for and securing University funding to support preliminary work leading up to the current projects. In fact, the three presentations reflect current support for four projects funded by four different Federal sources: two in the National Institutes of Health (National Institute of Nursing Research and National Institute of Mental Health), one from Centers for Disease Control, and one from the Division of Health and Human Services (Administration for Child and Family). The School of Nursing is the home of the Center for Innovation in Health Disparities Research led by Dr. Chris McQuiston and these projects demonstrate the kind of research and community collaboration that is synergy in health disparities research in North Carolina.

Persistent efforts to maintain communication, engender mutual trust and honor the interests and needs represented by the community participants were reported. In working with the Latino community Dr. McQuiston described the meetings that occurred over an 18-month period that preceded the current NINR-funded research project. Dr. McQuiston has invested in Spanish language training and said that after a number of years of language study she is able to understand humor within the group. In the projects with low-income and Latina mothers and Head Start personnel, Dr. Beeber reported on the extensive work her team and community collaborators undertook to develop conceptual, semantic and linguistic equivalence in the data collection instruments they are using with Latina mothers. She said that nurse and interpreter teams work with participants because master's prepared bilinguals psychiatric are not available in North Carolina. In rural African-American communities Dr. Goepfenger initially worked with recognized African American community leaders, local health departments, and voluntary associations, which led to community members who undertook training in the arthritis and chronic disease self-management interventions. The community participants chose the title *Yes I can* for the project, which involved preliminary studies to assure cultural sensitivity of the interventions. The workshops completed within *Yes I can* by trained community coordinators demonstrated the success of the partnerships, which were redefined by the academicians and community participants as *mutual help*. Dr. Goepfenger emphasized

that a number of recruitment strategies are required and that personal contact was essential to engage participants in the workshops.

In the development of the projects the presenters discussed how shaping the interests and needs represented by the participants into attainable goals and research questions was necessary before proposals could be finalized. After funding for a project was obtained, the presenters said that they used a number of approaches to help the teams focus the specific goals of the project. .

Drs. McQuiston, Beeber and Goepfinger were enthusiastic about the rewards of conducting research in collaboration with community participants. Dr. Beeber said that one of the greatest rewards was in seeing the intervention work. Dr. McQuiston stressed the value of an iterative process of look – think – act that allows the development of consensus and common goals. Dr. Goepfinger reported that communication with community participants, facilitating training in the chronic disease management intervention and seeing the outcomes of the intervention were special rewards. The presenters imparted enthusiasm for community participation in research for elimination of health disparities and their reports demonstrate that the approaches they are using are effective in mobilizing community participants around common goals.

* These presentations were presented at the University of North Carolina, School of Nursing on September 13, 2004 at the Center for Innovation in Health Disparities Research seminar series. The presentations were based on three of five abstracts in the symposium C01 Collaboration between academic and community participants in research to eliminate health disparities to be presented at the State-of-the Science in Nursing Research (October 7 -9, 2005) - *Molly C. Dougherty, reporting.*