

Resources to Improve Access to Palliative Care for Latinos: Education to Build Culturally Skilled Health Professionals and Latino Community Health Empowerment

Background

Latinos/Hispanics are the largest minority group in the United States and comprise over 17% of the total population. However, despite this growth Latinos continue to experience significant health disparities including limited access to culturally competent palliative care. Limited referral to palliative care, assumption that family will care for patients, cultural & language barriers, low levels of patient engagement and lack of patient knowledge about benefits of palliative care are some of the barriers that limit access for Latinos to palliative care. Lack of palliative care for Latinos leads to lower quality of life for patients with severe chronic conditions and higher healthcare costs. The diagnoses of a severe chronic condition and the end of life process should focus on creating an environment that allows patients to experience comfort, dignity, and the best quality of life possible. Limited access to palliative care and hospice indicates Latinos diagnosed with severe or life threatening illnesses are not able to lead the best quality of life possible.



Building the Components: Palliative Care for Latinos

The program is led by the nonprofit Familias en Acción and uses a collaborative model made possible by funding from Cambia Health Foundation, and the partner organizations' in-kind support and involvement. Partner organizations include the University of Portland Academic Technology Services and California State University Institute for Palliative Care. A palliative care advisory council includes patients and health professionals with palliative care, hospice and Hispanic health expertise from throughout the country. Members represent community organizations, academia and healthcare organizations.

(1) **Culturally specific patient navigators:** Patient navigators play an invaluable role in providing access to palliative care and hospice for Latinos. They serve as advocates by partnering with healthcare providers to ensure culturally competent patient centered care addressing their physical, spiritual and psychosocial needs. They serve as an important liaison between the patient/family and healthcare system.

(2) **Increasing Latino community awareness of palliative care: Empoderate/Empower Yourself: Health Empowerment for Latinos.** *Empoderate* is a two hour educational program for Latino patients and their families dealing with chronic disease. The objectives are to promote health literacy, empower them to utilize medical systems and to be introduced to palliative care.

(3) **Cultural Competence Training in Palliative Care for Health Care Staff and Organizations:** *Culturally Competent Palliative Care for Latinos* is an online and in-person training for healthcare professionals and students to increase their knowledge of cultural issues affecting Hispanic patients and to build their capacity for cross cultural communication and culturally sensitive palliative care. The online training is being offered by California State University Institute for Palliative Care in partnership with Familias en Acción as a two week, instructor facilitated course. Twelve continuing education units (CEU's) are available.

(4) **Building Partnerships and Culturally Competent Health Care Organizations:** On September 19, 2014 Familias en Acción held a palliative care for Latinos summit. Over 70 participants attended the summit representing diverse disciplines including nursing, medicine, social work, clergy, caregivers, community health workers, patient navigators, administrators and community members. Participants provided recommendations for culturally competent palliative care to become the foundation for all patient and family encounters.

Definition of Palliative Care

Palliative care is a medical specialty but it is also a philosophy or attitude about patients and life. Palliative care offers relief from suffering to patients with serious and complex illness. It addresses the "whole person" and the family (physically, emotionally, and spiritually) honoring their cultural perspective and beliefs.

Palliative Care for Latinos: Summary of Recommendations

Culturally competent healthcare organizations

- Ongoing cultural competence training required for all health system personnel including the following: Hispanic culture and values, cross cultural communication, culturally sensitive communication, culturally appropriate care and patient health literacy
- Hire bilingual/bicultural personnel at all levels
- Ensure access to interpreters for non-English speaking patients
- Conduct annual audits to ensure access for non-English speaking patients to health services including communication, signage, forms, clinical instructions
- Develop and implement policies for a culturally inclusive organization

Integrate patient navigators, community health workers or *promotores de salud* as members of the care team

- Contract with culturally specific community organizations to hire bilingual/bicultural patient navigators, community health workers or *promotores de salud*
- Internally hire bilingual/bicultural patient navigators, community health workers or *promotores de salud*
- Provide training and support for the integration of patient navigators, community health workers or *promotores de salud* into care coordination team

Ongoing cultural competence and palliative care training for all staff

- Implement culturally competent palliative care as an organizational value
- Provide ongoing training for all personnel in culturally competent palliative care
- Include patient navigators, community health workers or *promotores de salud* in providing palliative care to patients and their families and with the end of life process
- Provide palliative care and end of life training for interpreters to enhance their skill for interpreting these difficult topics

Community palliative care education

- Utilize culturally and linguistic appropriate curricula to enhance community understanding of palliative care and advance planning. *Empoderate/Empower Yourself: Health Empowerment for Latinos* is available through Familias en Acción (www.familiasenaccion.org)
- Partner with the Spanish language media to develop palliative care public service announcements
- Partner with faith leaders in palliative care education for their communities

Partnerships between healthcare organizations and community resources to address social determinants

- Develop ongoing relationships with Hispanic serving social service organizations
- Develop contracts with community organizations to provide patient navigator, community health worker or promotor de salud services
- Include patient navigators, community health workers or *promotores de salud* as members of care coordination team to address social determinants that impact patients' disease management

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