Regional Focus


Cardiac Screening
Developing a risk assessment program for the community

By Betty Jung, BSN, RN

THE CENTER FOR Community Health Promotion and Wellness at SUNY Downstate Medical Center, Brooklyn, NY, established a free cardiac risk assessment screening program in 1996. It targets community members who are medically under-served. The clinic is managed by two RNs.

The goal is to improve cardiovascular health and quality of life for the underserved population through prevention, early detection, treatment, and access to care. Key components include:
- Comprehensive cardiac risk assessment interviews (on-site and during community outreach events)
- Free blood pressure reading, height and weight measurement, serum blood tests (total and HDL cholesterol and random blood glucose), and family/other risk factor assessment
- Health education that incorporates their culture and religious practices
- Referrals to primary care providers; free monthly cardiac and diabetes educational clubs; and free community health promotion lectures/sessions
- Referrals for securing healthcare insurance coverage for uninsured individuals

Targeting Community Needs
The free program serves a large, predominantly minority community (91%). It is well-established that nationwide African-Americans suffer from relatively high rates of cardiovascular disease. The CDC reports the age-adjusted death rate for heart disease is 42% higher in African-American males than whites, and 65% higher in African-American females than whites.

Community needs around cardiovascular disease prevention and care were also assessed via an extensive number of community outreach activities including collaboration with churches, block associations, and community-based organizations. Most of the community members encountered lack of basic knowledge in prevention of cardiovascular disease. Many have poor eating habits, are overweight, smoking, have sedentary lifestyles, and accessing care only when “feeling unwell.” They often lack skills to navigate the healthcare system and/or are intimidated by healthcare providers.

The nurses from the cardiac risk assessment screening program work as a unified team to collaborate with churches/faith groups, community-based organizations, public officials, local school districts, and business entities.

Key partners such as the American Heart Association and the American Diabetes Association facilitate referrals to the program, monthly cardiac and diabetes education clubs, and community health seminars related to cardiovascular and diabetes disease prevention. Media advertisements are also used to promote the program.

Achieving Results
The most significant measurable result of program success is the number of people that received cardiac risk assessment screenings. As of 2014, 6,464 individuals were screened. It has been calculated that 51% of this group have been identified as being at risk for the development of cardiovascular disease due to elevated blood pressure, elevated lipid levels, elevated blood glucose levels, overweight and/or obese, sedentary lifestyle, unhealthy diet, smoking, and/or family history of cardiovascular disease. All at-risk individuals identified were referred to appropriated healthcare services for treatment and care.

Because it is a nurse-managed program, the community members feel comfortable in providing information on health concerns and ask questions on how to improve their health. The nurses also conduct telephone follow-ups, and the patients generally agree to recommendations provided.

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