



La Noticia De Salud

The Official Newsletter of the Connecticut Center for
Eliminating Health Disparities among Latinos*

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Director's Column



Our recently released logo shown in the masthead of this newsletter for the first time represents the fact that the central mission of CEHDL (pronounced 'seed-l') is to plant seeds that lead to meaningful efforts that help understand, address and ultimately help eliminate the unacceptable health inequities affecting our Latino communities and other minority groups in Connecticut. I am happy to report that CEHDL continues planting seeds and seeing them bloom into innovative and solid multi-institutional and interdisciplinary partnerships. This past Fall CEHDL developed and taught a Latino Health & Health Care course targeting both undergraduate and graduate students (see featured article). CEHDL has recently established a partnership with the School of Social Work Vieques field experience led by Drs. **Antonia Cordero** and **Lirio Negroni** (see featured articles) and continues to strengthen its support for key programs at UConn, the Hispanic Health Council and Hartford Hospital that are successfully recruiting and retaining minority high school and undergraduate students interested in the health sciences. This includes the UConn LSAMP Undergraduate Scholar Program and the High School Summer Research Apprentice Program (HSSRAP). It also includes CEHDL's efforts at coordinating UConn and Hartford Hospital public health and clinical care partnerships with the University of Puerto Rico. This Spring semester CEHDL will run again its very successful masters and doctoral fellowship competitions. CEHDL also continues to make substantial progress in the research arena by successfully launching a major diabetes peer counseling randomized controlled trial, by supporting planning grants and pilot studies of its affiliates, and by recently publishing a major symposium that it organized on "Evidence-Based Public Nutrition" that made it to the cover of the February 2007 issue of the *Journal of Nutrition*. CEHDL will run again this year its seed grant competition with funding support from the Office of the Vice Provost for Research and Graduate Education, and The Department of Nutritional Sciences. Our first-class seminar series continues to draw large audiences from academia, medical and public health institutions, and community agencies. The planning for our Cancer Disparities conference on May 16 is well advanced thanks to the work and dedication of the multi-institutional organizing committee. CEHDL continues to develop community relevant studies as illustrated by the featured article by **Merrill Singer** and **Hassan Salaheen** on the meaning of the term "health disparities" among low-income Latinos. The discussion of the use of the term "health disparities" and other alternative terms is not a trivial issue as it was extensively discussed at the recent NIH Health Disparities conference attended and summarized by **Grace Damio** in this issue. It is my hope that all of us continue planting many seeds. May many flowers bloom!

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Inside this Issue:

Community Knowledge about Health Disparities: Findings From Survey	2
Transformative Learning through an Immersion Experience in Puerto Rico	3
Understanding and Reducing Health Disparities: Contributions from the Behavioral and Social Sciences	4
Affiliates Corner	5
Latino Health and Health Care Course	6

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Community Knowledge about Health Disparities: Findings From Health Fair Survey

Merrill Singer and Hassan Salaheen, The Hispanic Health Council

On August 11, 2006, the Hispanic Health Council in conjunction with CEHDL held its 15th annual community health fair in South Green Park in the heart of Hartford's Latino community. This centerpiece event of Hispanic Health Council efforts to expand health care access, health education and community outreach is designed to link community members in need of health services with health information, and with health and social service providers in the Hartford area. With support from CEHDL and other participating organizations and contributors, including CEHDL partner, the Hartford Hospital, a very successful health fair attracted over 1,000 inner city adults and children to the booths and staff of over 80 service providers. A special focus of the health fair was on health screenings for a wide array of health problems (e.g., HIV, prostate cancer, breast cancer, asthma, diabetes, obesity, blood pressure) and follow up to insure that individuals from the community with positive health screenings were linked to services after the completion of the fair.

At the health fair, CEHDL initiated a nonrandom, opportunistic survey of community members concerning awareness and understanding of health disparities and personal experiences with health disparities. The brief survey consisted of 12 items. A total of 57 community members were interviewed in either English or Spanish. Notably 79% of survey respondents said they had never heard the term "health disparities" before. Nonetheless, 39 individuals were aware that certain diseases are disproportionately common among Latinos. Asked to identify these, the most commonly selected health condition was diabetes, followed by hypertension, cancer, HIV/AIDS and hepatitis. Other conditions that are particularly prevalent among Latinos, like asthma and substance abuse disorders, were not identified by many survey participants. Even HIV/AIDS was mentioned by only eight respondents.

Participants in the survey also identified diseases that are less prevalent among Latinos. Only seven respondents believed that this category, but there were diseases these were.

In response to the question, "Do you think getting access to health care is almost 75% of respondents answered when asked if Latinos get the same health care as Latino Whites, 65% did not believe

cited a number of reasons for unequal health care access, including the price of quality services, ethnic discrimination, poverty, lack of insurance coverage, language barriers, lack of appropriate education among both providers and patients, and lack of confidence among some Latinos in using the health care system. For example, one participant indicated that health care providers "talk to us bad and treat us poorly" while another urged that providers should "treat everyone equal." Although many respondents were uncertain how to improve health care for Latinos, and expressed frustration about the difficulty of finding a solution, some urged the involvement of doctors and community members in the creation of a more equitable health care system with fair insurance coverage and improved health education. Noted one participant, the problem could be solved by having "communities coming together and taking it to the Capitol."

While the survey on health disparities conducted at the Hispanic Health Council's health fair cannot be generalized to the wider Latino community of Hartford or Connecticut, the findings are suggestive. The concept of health disparities has been extensively absorbed into the public health discourse, is the topic of hundreds of professional publications, and is regularly discussed at local, regional, and national health conferences. Further, the concept has been adopted by health policy-makers and health care program administrators and provider institutions. If the findings of the CEHDL survey are reflective of wider patterns, however, the concept has not become part of community understanding of health issues, including in the very communities with the most significant rates of health inequality and disparity. Moreover, survey findings suggest that there is limited awareness in the Latino community of the array of diseases that are disproportionately prevalent as well as less common than would be expected among Latinos. These pilot findings point to the critical need for more rigorous investigation of popular awareness and understanding of health disparities among Latinos.

Finally, it is clear that in one domain Latino community members may be more fully informed than the general public about health disparities, namely with regard to barriers to access to health care and access to culturally sensitive treatment. The majority of respondents were aware of the pressing problem of unequal access, presumably reflecting their own personal experiences with the health care system.

"...survey findings suggest that there is limited awareness in the Latino community of the array of diseases that are disproportionately prevalent as well as less common than would be expected among Latinos. These pilot findings point to the critical need for more rigorous investigation of popular awareness and understanding of health disparities among Latinos"

were asked if there are any diseases that are less prevalent among Latinos than other ethnicities. There are diseases that fell into this category, but there was uncertainty about which

you think Latinos have a harder time getting access to health care than non-Latino Whites?" in the affirmative. Similarly, when asked if the quality of health care for Latinos was the same as for non-Latinos, this was the case. Participants

Transformative Learning through an Immersion Experience in Vieques, Puerto Rico

Antonia Cordero and Lirio K. Negroni



Zaida Torres & students hold the Memorial Quilt to those who died.

In January of 2005 Professors **Lirio K. Negroni** and **Antonia Cordero** conducted a ten-day Travel Study course to Puerto Rico with various University of Connecticut participants (9 social work students, an undergraduate student, a social work alumni and faculty member). The participants traveled to San Juan and Vieques, Puerto Rico, as part of an exchange program with the University of Puerto Rico’s School of Social Work. The course combines traditional diversity teaching methods with an immersion experience that fosters cross-cultural learning and social justice advocacy. It is designed to help participants to recognize and value the importance of Puerto Rico’s history and culture, as well as the impact of the United States’ socio-political oppression of island and mainland Puerto Ricans. The travel

course was developed and taught for the first time in 2000 by professors Negroni and Morales. Since then, over 40 participants have been involved in this transformative learning experience.

The visit to Vieques is part of an ongoing effort to raise consciousness and to undertake advocacy activities, initiated in 1999 at the School of Social Work by professors Julio Morales and Lirio Negroni, and the Latin American Student Association; as well as, a planned learning experience to expose travel study participants to the health and environmental disparities suffered by island residents as a result of human rights violations and social injustices. As a consequence of sixty years of bombardment and military maneuvers by the United States Navy, Vieques water, soil and air are contaminated with alarming levels of heavy metals and toxins. Such physical conditions have affected the health and quality of life of thousands of children and adults. In May 2005, after years of peaceful protests and civil demonstrations by the Puerto Rican people and their supporters, the Navy withdrew its troops. To date, the Navy has made no efforts to restore the environment, preserve wild life and address the health crisis caused by six decades of naval bombardment that continues to plague the island and its people.

Motivated by their visit to Vieques and discussions with community leaders and island residents, many course participants have remained active in Connecticut’s Vieques advocacy movement. In 2005, impacted by the conditions they witnessed in Vieques, travel study students developed a film to publicize the years of human rights struggles by island residents. The health crisis, health disparities, and reparation claims against the United States Navy are documented in this film. The film can be viewed at the Puerto Rican/Latino/a Studies Project website (<http://web.uconn.edu/prlsp/>). It should be noted that while the development of this film was supported by the university’s faculty and staff, the content and focus of the film is student-driven. As a consequence, the power of its message is a tribute to University of Connecticut social work students’ commitment to social justice for Vieques, Puerto Rico. The film is shared with others to raise awareness and in the hopes that others will raise their voices and take action to advocate on behalf of the people of Vieques.



Memorial to those who died before the Navy's withdrawal.



UConn students attending lecture by Vieques leaders.



Jose Pucho Carron presenting his “Disobedient” exhibit.

(Article continues on page 7.)

Understanding and Reducing Health Disparities: Contributions from the Behavioral and Social Sciences

Grace Damio, Hispanic Health Council

The NIH conference entitled: “Understanding and Reducing Health Disparities: Contributions from the Behavioral and Social Sciences”^{*} provided the opportunity for exposure to some of the leading social and behavioral science research on health disparities, and to presentations by NIH leadership on NIH priorities and perspective regarding health disparities research. Overall, the two-day conference of 29 speakers and 55 poster presentations, served as an affirmation of the direction of CEHDL, and inspiration to continue deepening our multi-disciplinary, translational approach to health disparity research in Connecticut.

The goal of the conference was to stimulate a greater role for behavioral health and social sciences in health disparities research, focusing on three broad areas of action that influence health disparities: policy, prevention and health care. The overarching theme of integrative, translational research for the development, testing and dissemination of interventions, and for the informing of policy, was established from the outset, through introductory remarks and presentations conducted by NIH Conference Planning Committee Co-Chairs: Dr. Ronald Abeles from the Office of Behavioral Health and Social Sciences and Dr. Susan Huertrin-Roberts of the National Cancer Institute; and NIH leadership: Dr. Raynard Kingston, Deputy Director of NIH, Dr. John Ruffin, Director, National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities, and Dr. David Abrams, Director, Office of Behavioral Health and Social Sciences Research.

Dr. Abeles highlighted the need for research in both basic and applied sciences – for understanding biometric pathways that influence health disparities, as well as highlighting the development, testing and delivery of interventions designed to reduce health disparities. Dr. Huertinequities in population health, nor any multi-level analysis is needed, including: systems, economics and politics, which inequities in health burden.

Dr. Kingston stated that health commitment across all 27 institutes and Director, and that each NIH Institute disparities, and is required to report to

Dr. Ruffin emphasized the critical interdisciplinary research, and of understanding and eliminating health

Dr. Abrams proposed the conceptual shift of working towards “improving parity” rather than “eliminating disparity”, as a way to think more proactively, instill a sense of confidence, and focus on goals and objectives. Abrams stressed the need for “transdisciplinary research from cells to society and across the lifespan,” in order to identify “fundamental mechanisms related to health disparities”, such as the evidence that stressful environments early in life create trajectories that permanently alter gene expression in the brain. He also discussed the need to identify the “causes of the causes” of health disparities, which are often at the macro level, and are now becoming elucidated. He emphasized the need for strong, integrative science, and applied research that embraces systems thinking and modeling, utilizes data from the individual agent based level to the political and socio-economic systems level, and is used to develop more precisely tailored interventions, and to inform policy. Abrams stated that small changes at the macro policy level can lead to major changes in disease burden in a relatively short period of time.

Following the speakers from NIH were presentations by Dr. Nancy Krieger and Dr. Nancy Adler. Krieger contributed a conceptual analysis of health disparities from the perspective of the “elephants in the room” – social injustice, social science and health inequities. She stated that the United States is unique in using the descriptive term health “disparities”, which implies only difference. She said that “not all differences are equal”, as “some are based in social injustice”. She quoted the World Health Organization’s statement that “health inequities are unnecessary and avoidable, but they are also unjust and unfair.” Kreiger also presented new work on current and changing inequities in U.S. premature mortality, mapping and measuring social disparities.

Dr. Adler provided an overview of “four generations” of health disparity research. Adler described the “fourth generation”, or current stage of research, as the one that is working to further refine the meaning and measurement of socio-economic status and race/ethnicity, seeking to develop more refined measures.

Dr. David Abrams, Director, NIH Office of Behavioral Health and Social Sciences Research stressed the need for “transdisciplinary research from cells to society and across the lifespan,” in order to identify “fundamental mechanisms related to health disparities”

Roberts stated that there is no one cause of one point of intervention, and that a psychology, culture, social structures and combine to create disparities in health and

disparity research is a deeply rooted centers of NIH, and the Office of the and Center has a strategic plan on health Congress on its progress.

importance of transdisciplinary and behavioral and social sciences towards disparities.

^{*}Conference took place October 23-24, 2006, at the NIH Campus Natcher Conference Center Bethesda, Maryland.

Affiliates Corner

Conferences and Meetings

Judy Lewis, David Gregorio and **Laurine Bow** met to discuss how CEHDL can help coordinate existing innovative partnerships and programs involving UConn faculty and Hartford Hospital with The University of Puerto Rico.

Rafael Pérez-Escamilla participated in the advisory committee meeting of the NIH Hispanic Health Disparities Research Center, University of Texas-El Paso, February 1-2.

Grace Damio attended the NIH conference 'Understanding and Reducing Health Disparities: Contributions from the Behavioral and Social Sciences', October 23-24, 2006, at the NIH Campus Natcher Conference Center Bethesda, Maryland.

Maria Luz Fernández and **Rafael Pérez-Escamilla** represented CEHDL at the UConn Science, Engineering & Health Professions Collaborative Symposium. Storrs, January 18, 2007.

¡Felicidades!

Margaret Hynes from the Connecticut Department of Public Health has been elected to serve in CEHDL's National Advisory Board. Dr. Hynes previously served in CEHDL's State Advisory Board. Her work is helping the State better understand the epidemiology of minority health outcomes and health inequities, and on effective ways to address them. She continues to make major contributions to CEHDL through her work and expert advise. Please join us in welcoming Margaret as the State representative in CEHDL's National Advisory Board!

Seminar Speaker

On November 10, **Dr. Daniel W. Sellen**, Associate Professor, Anthropology and Public Health Sciences, University of Toronto, Canada presented the seminar 'Social capital, acculturation, nutrition, and health disparities among refugees in the UK, USA, and Canada: Challenges for research.' His excellent seminar was attended to full capacity and generated many ideas for collaborative work. For more information on this and other CEHDL seminars, access www.cehdl.uconn.edu.



New Face at CEHDL

We welcome Karen D'Angelo to the position of CEHDL cross-cultural trainer. Karen recently attained a Master of Social Work degree from University of Connecticut with a concentration in community organizing. She has a strong interest in healthcare and a passion for social justice. Karen was a founding member of the UConn School of Social Work Committee for Multicultural Awareness and Social Justice. In this role, she helped create a cross-cultural training curriculum that delves beyond the often superficial understanding of culture towards awareness of the many dimensions of diversity, and provides a foundation for effective social work practice with diverse populations. Karen will work closely with Grace Damio, Judy Lewis, and Stacey Brown to develop and implement a best-practices model for the cross-cultural training of healthcare providers.



Save the Date: Reducing Cancer Disparities in Connecticut. CEHDL annual conference. Rome Ballroom, UConn Storrs, May 16, 2007.

Latino Health and Health Care Course

Rafael Pérez-Escamilla, PhD and Amber Hromi-Fiedler, MPH, PhD Candidate

The Latino Health and Health Care Course was re-developed by CEHDL and taught in the Fall semester of 2006 under the coordination of **Dr. Rafael Pérez-Escamilla** and **Amber Hromi-Fiedler**. This effort built upon a course developed several years ago by **Prof. Marysol Asencio**. This cross listed course was available to both undergraduate and graduate students and supported by CEHDL as well as the Department of Human Development and Family Studies, the Institute of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies, and the graduate program in Public Health. Twenty-six students participated in the class, nineteen were undergraduates and seven were graduate students.

The 3-credit course was designed to teach students about the health issues and challenges facing Latina/os in the United States, specifically focusing on health disparities among Latina/os and other race/ethnic groups. The course covered several topics addressing barriers and health problems that Latinos face including access to health care, acculturation, cultural skills, language barriers, racism, emphasizing biological, cultural and social factors associated with health promotion and disease prevention (the **course syllabus** can be accessed at www.cehdl.uconn.edu).

Students that completed the course had this to say about their experience:

"I enjoyed the course and did learn things. I didn't know about Latino health disparities..... overall though, I think it will help me with my future career in nursing to help cater more to minorities"

"This was by far one of the best [courses] I have taken. The content, the speakers, the professor and TA were all engaging, passionate and easily understandable. I am seriously considering a career within this field. Great job!"

This course sought to teach students to (1) understand the variables known to influence health disparities, (2) distinguish among different populations of Latina/os in terms of health outcomes, (3) understand the principles of cultural skills, and (4) understand Latina/o health in terms of larger social, cultural issues.

The course combined: lectures, guest-lectures, in-class discussions, class readings and written summaries, class assignments, final term papers and examinations, as well as group presentations to achieve these objectives. The students developed health disparities papers in the areas of:

Obesity during pregnancy	Post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD's)
Diabetes	HIV and sexual behaviors
Prenatal care	Smoking
Breastfeeding	Physical activity

Feedback from the students indicated that the course educated them about health disparities and Latino health. The majority of students evaluating the course (n=23) claimed that they had known little about health disparities and Latino Health before this class (65.2% and 78.3%, respectively). Most students felt that they learned quite a bit about health disparities and Latino Health through this course (91.3% and 82.6%, respectively). Over half (56.5%) agreed that the course provided a good balance between theory and application, while most (78.3%) felt it illustrated the value of research to inform minority health policies. Most students agreed that this course was very well organized (73.9%), and that the lecturers knew their material (95.5%) and were engaging and inspirational (60.8%).

Some of the coursework requirements benefited students in learning about health disparities and Latino health. Of the students who responded to the question, 64.3% agreed that the term paper and corresponding group paper presentation were very relevant to the course. Over three-fourths (78.3%) of students felt they learned from the two class assignments, while 52.1% reported the weekly readings and summaries contributed to their learning about health disparities and Latino health.

In addition to providing students with better understanding and knowledge about health disparities and Latino health, the Latino Health and Health Care course encouraged some students to think about minority health as a future career path. Over half (52.2%) of the students agreed that they planned to take further courses or felt more prepared in the field of minority health because they had taken the Latino Health and Health Care class. As well, 43.4% felt that this class motivated them to pursue a career related to minority health.

Finally, for 52.1% of the students, the course met their expectations. Over half (52.1%) reported that they would recommend the course to their peers.

Acknowledgment: We would like to express our appreciation to Profs. Marysol Asencio (CEHDL State Advisory Board

member) and Maria Luz Fernández (CEHDL Education Core director) for all their input re-designing this course. The following individuals delivered guest lectures: **Marysol Asencio** (Institute of Puerto Rican & Latino Studies, Human Development & Family Studies), **Julie Wagner** (UConn's School of Medicine), **Grace Damio** (Hispanic Health Council), **Margaret Hynes** (Department of Public Health), **Jose Ortiz** (Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services), **Gualberto Rúaño** (Genomas & Hartford Hospital), **Sonia Gaztambide** (Institute of Living), **Pam Erickson** (Anthropology), **Merrill Singer** (Hispanic Health Council), **Maria Luz Fernández** (Nutritional Sciences).

(“Transformative Learning through an Immersion Experience in Vieques, Puerto Rico”, continued from page 3.)

Antonia Cordero's Bio



Professor Antonia Cordero received a doctorate in social work from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and earned a master's of social work from Columbia University; she is an alumna of the Council on Social Work Education's Minority Fellowship. Prior to this teaching appointment she had a long history of direct social work practice and community engagement in New York City. She received the first University of Connecticut Outreach Faculty Public Service award for her work as a faculty member in the Puerto Rican/Latino Studies Project. Dr Cordero's research areas are Latino/a studies, child welfare and mental health.

Lirio K. Negroni's Bio

Professor Lirio K. Negroni earned her BSW and MSW degrees from the University of Puerto Rico, and her Ph.D. from Boston College. She worked for 14 years as a social work practitioner and has been a social work educator since 1993. Dr. Negroni's 20 years of community service in the Worcester, Springfield, Hartford areas and Puerto Rico have consisted mostly of grassroots organizing, health and mental health education and advocacy. In 2005 she received a CARITAS Award, from St. Joseph College, for Advancing Women, Culture, and Society through her community service. She is an alumna of the Council on Social Work Education Minority Fellowship Program. Her work focuses on Latinos/as and child abuse, mental health and substance abuse prevention, culturally competent social work practice, university-community partnerships, child welfare, mentoring and advising.



CEHDL Publications

Last April CEHDL organized the symposium ‘Evidence-Based Public Nutrition: An Evolving Concept’ at the Experimental Biology meetings in San Francisco. The proceedings edited by **Rafael Pérez-Escamilla** and **Janet King** appeared in the February 2007 issue of the *Journal of Nutrition*. They include papers on the conceptual definition of EBPN, and the application of this approach to: Improve dietary guidelines and food labels, promote breastfeeding, and properly address the obesity epidemic. For more information on this publication you can access the ‘peer reviewed publications’ link in CEHDL's website.

Alex K. Anderson, Grace Damio, Donna J. Chapman, and Rafael Pérez-Escamilla. Differential Response to an Exclusive Breastfeeding Peer Counseling Intervention: The Role of Ethnicity. *J Hum Lact* 2007 23: 16-23. This publication is the lead article in the February 2007 issue of the *Journal of Human Lactation* and can be downloaded from: <http://jhl.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/23/1/16>.

Info on CEHDL peer reviewed publications can be found at www.cehdl.uconn.edu.

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CEHDL's mission is to contribute to the elimination of health disparities among Latino(a)s through the formation of human resources, community-based research, and culturally appropriate outreach/extension.

WE'RE ON THE WEB!

GO TO WWW.CEHDL.UCONN.EDU



Hispanic Health Council



University of Connecticut



Upcoming Events



- ➡ Reducing Cancer Disparities in Connecticut and Beyond. **CEHDL 2nd annual conference. Rome Ballroom, UConn Storrs, May 16, 2007.** More information can be accessed at www.cehdl.uconn.edu.
- ➡ New England Regional Minority Health Conference Eliminating Health Disparities by 2010: Economic and Moral Imperatives, Foxwoods Conference Center, Mashantucket, CT, April 2-4, 2007. **CEHDL's workshop at this conference will be on April 2 from 1:30 to 3:00 pm.**

We want to hear from you! We would like to hear your feedback or suggestions about this newsletter. Also be sure to please keep us posted on any news you wish to share in this newsletter. Please contact Shannon Haynes (shannon.haynes@gmail.com).

NIH Conference!

The presentations (power points and audio) from the NIH Conference on **Understanding and Reducing Disparities in Health: Behavioral and Social Sciences Research Contributions** (see **Grace Damio's** article in this issue), October 23-24, 2006, can be found at: <http://obsr.od.nih.gov/HealthDisparities/presentation.html>.