

## Outreach, clinical trials shine light on Latino health disparities

By Joseph Pena

In 1999, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention targeted minority populations disproportionately affected by breast and cervical cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, child and adult immunization levels, HIV/AIDS and infant mortality.

For example, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released a report stating Latinos are twice as likely to die from diabetes and suffer higher rates of blood pressure. Also, Latinos comprise 14 percent of the U.S. population but make up almost 19 percent of the population living with HIV/AIDS.

Though a solution is far from near, the CDC is making efforts nationwide to end health disparities in minority populations by the year 2010. The Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) project has awarded more than \$19 million in grants to health centers in 19 states.

Locally, Wayne Bardwell, a clinical psychologist at UCSD, has worked on numerous studies linking psychosocial aspects with physiological aspects of a disease. Currently, Bardwell is working on studies focusing on breast cancer among a variety of ethnicities. More than 3,000 women are participating in the study in California, Arizona, Oregon and Texas.

Bardwell is also working on a study that focuses on the effects of stress on sleep and blood pressure. Patients in the study receive physical exams, detailed blood pressure reports and sleep analysis information that is available to few people. The information is then shared with the participant's primary care physician.

Rodney Von Jaeger, a study manager at the HIV Neurobehavioral Research Center in Hillcrest, said the HNRC has a number of initiatives that target Latino populations to get involved with studies.

“We feel this is important for two reasons,” said Von Jaeger, via email. “One, We believe that people should have equal access to participation; and two, we believe that the research benefits by being diverse and representative of the affected populations.”

The HNRC studies the effects of HIV on the brain and central nervous system and specific substances that may trigger these effects.

Von Jaeger said that between 25 and 28 percent of the program’s participants are Latino and 30 percent are women. The center has worked on a marketing campaign to increase Latino women to participate in studies.

“In many cases, women are the primary care givers [in Latino families],” said von Jaeger. “They are so focused on their families that they aren’t taking care of themselves.”

Other problems studies face in increasing participation is cultural and language barriers. Although the HNRC is staffed with bilingual and bicultural employees to meet monolingual needs, von Jaeger feels that patients can’t be sure someone will always be able to meet their needs. However, von Jaeger is confident that the center is following through with many of the initiatives.

“We’re making progress,” said von Jaeger. “But we realize that we need to make more.”

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