

DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY-BASED PARTNERSHIPS IN MINORITY AGING RESEARCH

The Resource Centers for Minority Aging Research (RCMAR) initiative was established in 1997 and currently includes six centers across the United States. The model of community engagement developed by all the RCMARs is Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR). This supplement explores the diverse methods of partnership building in each RCMAR and highlights some of the successes and challenges encountered in CBPR. Two articles focus on how the CBPR infrastructure facilitates the conduct of research in minority communities. Two other manuscripts discuss the unique experiences at those RCMARs in the CBPR partnership development process. The final paper describes the mentoring processes used at each of the RCMARs for both junior academic investigators and community members. We conclude that CBPR is a difficult and long-term process requiring substantial buy-in and commitments from both the academic and community partners in a continuous and evolving collaborative partnership. (*Ethn Dis.* 2007;17[suppl 1]:S1-3-S1-5)

Key Words: Community-Based Participatory Research, Minority Groups, Ethnic groups, Health disparities, aging

Olveen Carrasquillo, MD, MPH; Letha A. Chadiha, PhD, MSW

The Resource Centers for Minority Aging Research (RCMAR) initiative was established in 1997 by the National Institute on Aging as part of its overall effort to reduce health disparities between minority and non-minority older adults. The RCMARs were mandated to include a community liaison core (CLC) whose mission was to develop and sustain mutually rewarding, productive, and culturally appropriate partnerships between academic institutions and their communities. In the second round of the RCMAR initiative, six centers across the United States were funded in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Colorado, Michigan, New York City, and South Carolina, as was one coordinating center.

The model of community engagement developed by all the RCMARs was that of community-based participatory research (CBPR), which is a collaborative approach to scientific inquiry conducted in equitable partnerships between academic researchers and the community being investigated.¹ In CBPR, community members and other key community stakeholders have the opportunity to be full participants in each phase of the work, including the conception, design, conduct, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of results.² This equitable partnership is the hallmark that distinguishes CBPR from traditional community-based research in which academic investigators maintain most of the control with respect to research question, study design, data analysis, and dissemination of findings. CBPR improves the quality and impact of research by generating better informed hypotheses, developing more effective interventions, and enhancing the translation of the research.³ The ultimate benefit from CBPR is a deeper understanding of a community's

unique circumstances and a more accurate framework for testing and adapting best practices to community needs. Funders are increasingly recognizing that the CBPR approach is particularly attractive for academics and public health professionals in the areas of health promotion, disease prevention, and health disparities.⁴

Despite the promise of CBPR, numerous challenges have arisen, not the least of which is the partnership development process itself. To increase the knowledge base in minority aging CBPR, in 2004, the CLC cores of each RCMAR organized a workshop at the annual conference of the Gerontological Society of America. The aim was to explore the diverse methods of partnership building in each RCMAR and highlight some of the successes and challenges encountered in CBPR. In this supplement, we expand on the descriptions of five of the projects presented at that workshop.

The first two papers in the series are examples of how having a CBPR infrastructure can greatly facilitate the conduct of research in minority communities. The first study describes the Colorado RCMAR's focus on the American Indian community. Unlike the other RCMARs described in this supplement, the Colorado site defines its community by race rather than by geography. Noe et al examined the potential of the CBPR approach for increasing recruitment of American Indians into research studies. The finding of these investigators, that adding CBPR components to the study design (ie, active community involvement and having an American Indian as principal investigator) increased the recruitment of American Indians into research, is a contribution to the CBPR literature. This study

From the Columbia University Resource Center for Minority Aging, New York, New York (OC); University of Michigan Resource Center for Minority Aging, Ann Arbor, Michigan (LAC).

Address correspondence and reprint requests to Olveen Carrasquillo MD, MPH; Associate Professor of Medicine and Health Policy & Management, Columbia University Medical Center; 622 W. 168th St., PH 9-East, Rm. 105; New York, NY 10032; 212-305-9782; 212-305-9349 (fax); oc6@columbia.edu