

Improving the Quality of Life of Seniors through Group Participation

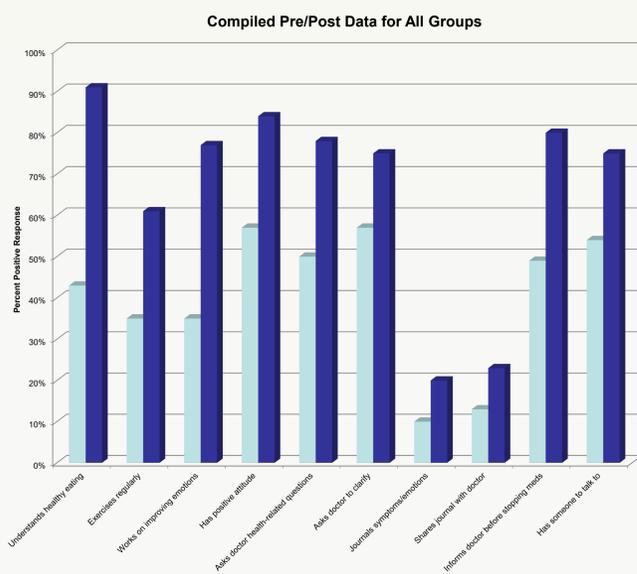
Rina Ramirez, MD FACP, Sarah Press, MSW LSW, Marvelia Mangogna, CSW
Zufall Health Center, Dover NJ

Background

Zufall Health Center is an FQHC that provides primary care and enabling services to uninsured and underserved persons living in communities in NJ. Hispanic elders currently in care at the health center present with complex health conditions and face barriers to receiving appropriate comprehensive care. With a grant from the Grotta Fund and transportation services provided by the Morris County Organization for Hispanic Affairs, we launched the Live Your Better Life Program (LYBL), an innovative health and social service program to serve Hispanic seniors living in the Dover NJ area. The program was designed to reach isolated Hispanic elders and engage them to interact with their surrounding social, cultural and medical community in order to improve their health and quality of life. It also sought to address the needs of seniors' caregivers as part of the family unit. During the 18 months of the grant period, a multidisciplinary staff held outreach activities, group workshops and individual sessions and 169 seniors, 62 of whom were residents of public housing, participated in the program.

Measures/Results

To measure the effectiveness of the program, the staff gave the members a pre-post test, conducted interviews, and collected feedback.

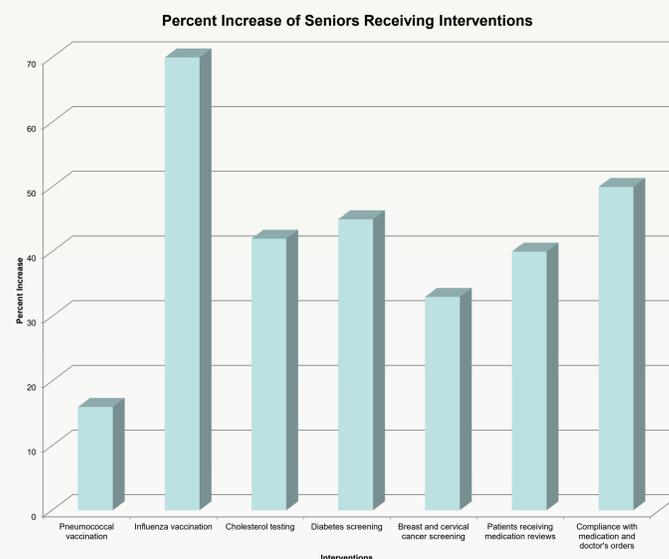


Objectives

- To develop a positive and collaborative relationship between seniors, their family members, and health care professionals
- To ease the burden on their caregivers through culturally sensitive eldercare training
- To increase participation in on-going medical and behavioral health care
- To improve the overall quality of life.

Measures/Results

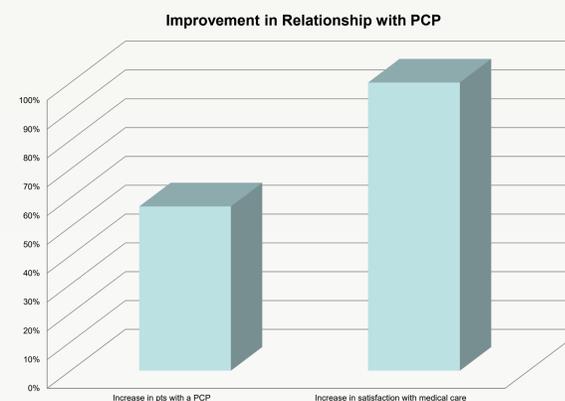
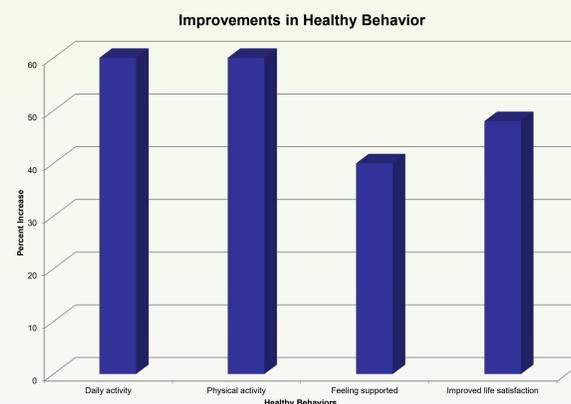
A total of 169 seniors attended 13 workshops during the grant period. 95% were women, 5% were men and 72% were Hispanic. 37% resided in public housing and 85% had health insurance. Workshops and services were provided in English and Spanish. The workshops were mainly conducted at the Zufall Health Center, although several successful workshops took place in public housing facilities. In addition, the LYBL staff helped 35 seniors who were in need of case management services. Several individuals also entered into therapy with the LCSW at the center.



Methods

Our method to empower seniors to become active managers of their physical and emotional health was through participation in group educational and support sessions. These focused on preventive health services, mental health, exercise and physical activity, nutrition and healthy eating, managing chronic illnesses, and enhancing communications with medical professionals. The team consisted of health center staff, including providers, social workers, navigators and a clinical pharmacist. The ideal group consisted of 15 participants that met for 1 and ½ hrs each week for 10 consecutive weeks. Pre-post tests were administered to determine changes in attitudes and behavior. The curriculum was slightly modified for each group to address specific needs, but the core elements remained the same.

Measures/Results



Discussion

What worked?

Relationships established in group sessions persisted beyond the end of the workshops. Transportation to group meeting sites a must. Exercise professional/personal trainer served as greatest incentive to continuing participation.

What did not work?

Seniors did not embrace journaling as a method for communicating with their PCP. Caregivers/family members did not easily engage in activities or respond to outreach efforts.

In all aspects of the program, there was significant improvement in behavior changes and attitudes as reported by the participants. Although caregivers and family members did not directly participate in the program, the desired outcomes of empowering the senior and easing the burden on the caregiver was achieved. This was determined from interviews and testimonials.

Conclusions

The Live Your Better Life program achieved its goals and objectives. Structured group sessions with a senior population, including those residing in public housing, resulted in significant improvements in the physical and emotional health indicators that were measured. Participants learned how to maintain independence, forged new friendships and support networks, learned how to live healthier and more active lives, and saw the value of becoming involved in their self-care. Community resources and partnerships are key to the success of the program. Future sessions will include more structured exercise activities and role playing as a communication learning tool.

References

McKay A, et al, "Thoughts and Feelings: Taking Control of Your Moods and Your Life", 3rd Ed. Oakland, CA, 2007
Lorig K et al, "Living a Healthy Life with Chronic Conditions", 3rd Ed. Boulder, CO, 2006.
Iowa State University Extension to Families: Pre-Post Test Survey
www.extension.iastate.edu



Special thanks to Amy Shan, 12th G, Morris Hills HS