A University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford Latino Medical Student Association (LMSA) and Rural Medicina Academy Partnership to Collaboratively Address the Latino Rural Health Workforce Gap

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Introduction

- The lack of underrepresented minorities (URMs) in the healthcare workforce is a major cause of health disparities among US ethnic and racial minorities.¹,²
- This gap is the result of obstructions in the K-12 educational system (e.g., low aspirations among URM youth, and lack of positive role models and parental support).¹
- Innovative paths such as K-12 pipeline programs targeting URMs have shown to be an effective way to address this health professions shortage.¹

Objective

To present on the partnership between the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford campus (UI COM-R) Latino Medical Student Association (LMSA) chapter, and the Rural Medicina Academy (RMA), a health career awareness pipeline program targeting rural minority youth.

Partnership Description

Background: The RMA - housed at the National Center for Rural Health Professions (NCRHP) at UI COM-R - is the rural extension of the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) College of Medicine Hispanic Center of Excellence (HCOE).

Setting: Aligned with the RMA’s mission, the UI COM-R LMSA chapter aims to unite and provide a voice for all UI COM-R Latino medical students, inform non-Latino peers on Latino health issues, and promote volunteerism in the Latino community. Our partnership is further strengthened by the incorporation of UIC College of Pharmacy-Rockford (UIC COP-R) Latino and non-Latino students into joint efforts.

RMA Program Components: The RMA incorporates a core curriculum comprised of four tracks: 1) Exploring Health Professions; 2) Understanding Health Disparities; 3) Professional Skills Development; and 4) Cultural Competency. Each track is covered by interactive activities encouraging critical thinking and open dialogue. In addition, the RMA is involved in outreach efforts, such as K-12 career fairs and community-led health fairs.

Implications

Our partnership aims to enhance health career awareness among RMA’s participants, and fosters mentorship roles and community engagement.

P2 UIC COP-R, 2013 Summer Scholars Mentor and Curriculum Instructor:

“Over the six weeks of the Summer Scholars Pilot Program I assisted with the RMA staff to exponentially expand the knowledge and awareness of the healthcare field to mostly Hispanic students. As we covered weekly topics that included clinical skills, health careers, and global health, I could see the students becoming more academically and emotionally invested in the program. Their level of motivation meshed well with the interest in healthcare that they demonstrated in their applications prior to the program. The amount of content I learned during the program surprised me, not only about the subjects that we covered, but about the students and about myself, as well. When I attend pharmacy classes, I learn about the hard sciences (physics, chemistry, biology, etc.), and the clinical sciences that focus on sculpting the mind of a pharmacist. The RMA, on the other hand, also focused on social sciences and while exposing the students to the hard and clinical sciences, I can thank the RMA and the NCRHP staff enough for the opportunity to participate in this program and be a role model for future healthcare professionals.”

High School Senior, 2013 Summer Scholars Participant:

“Being part of Rural Medicina Academy has motivated me to pursue a career in Pharmacy; it made me realize the importance of striving for the best because your whole life is an investment in itself. The more you put into it the more you will get out of it. My favorite part of the program would be the motivating speakers that come to talk to us, they were encouraging and very informative. Being in a program that hands on and intensive makes the learning experience memorable.”

Next Steps

After the demonstrated success of our partnership, we plan on expanding in other rural Illinois communities in order to provide increased access to educational opportunities, and enhance LMSA outreach efforts.

Theoretical Framework

The RMA – and our partnership – is grounded in Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), a model in which community and academic partners combine knowledge and action for social change to improve community health and eliminate health disparities.

UI COM-R LMSA members participate as mentors, curriculum consultants, and instructors for the RMA, as well as take the lead in the joint implementation of community health fairs.

References