

**September/October 2011**

**A Needs Assessment to Develop Community Partnerships: Initial Steps Working with a Major Agricultural Community**

**Ashley Walker, Jill Bezyak, Elizabeth Gilbert, and April Trice**

Background: Healthy People 2010 identified community partnership as one of the most effective strategies in eliminating health disparities and considered it a critical element in improving an individual's quality of life. To be effective at engaging communities in partnerships, an initial community based needs assessment is recommended. Purpose: The purpose of this project was to use a community assessment to establish if there is a need for community partnerships in a rural Northern Colorado county. Methods: A mixed-methods design using an online survey and focus groups was used to collect data. Results: The analysis of the online survey indicated strong support for community partnerships and analysis of focus group transcriptions found both barriers and solutions to human service delivery. Discussion: Survey responses indicated a perception of support, involvement, and interest in community partnerships; however, focus groups revealed that although some partnerships do exist, significant improvement is needed to better serve disparate populations. Translation to Health Education Practice: Future health educators must be equipped with the strategies to effectively address disparate populations and incorporate community partnerships within their agencies once they graduate and enter into employment.

**Influences of Constructivist-Oriented Nutrition Education on Urban Middle School Students' Nutrition Knowledge, Self-efficacy, and Behaviors**

**Nate McCaughtry, Mariane Fahlman, Jeffrey J. Martin, and Bo Shen**

Background: Health professionals are looking to nutrition-based youth health interventions in K-12 schools to combat the growing obesity crisis; however, none have explored the influences of interventions guided by constructivist learning theory. Purpose: This study examined the influences of a constructivist-oriented nutrition education program on urban middle school students' nutrition knowledge, self-efficacy and behaviors. Methods: A quasi-experimental design examined changes in middle schools students' (N = 1,476) nutrition knowledge, self-efficacy and behaviors, relative to a control group (N = 656), in response to a 6-lesson nutrition education intervention. Results: For dietary knowledge and self-efficacy, there were significant group and time main effects and group x time interactions. In addition, there were significant group and time main effects and a group x time interaction for the dietary behaviors related to consuming fruits, vegetables, meats and "other" food groups, but not dairy or grains. Discussion: The constructivist-oriented professional development, curriculum and instruction yielded significant changes in middle schools students' nutrition knowledge, self-efficacy and behaviors. Translation to Health Education Practice: Given the efficacy of the intervention curriculum and instruction, K-12 teachers are encouraged to implement similar high quality, theoretically grounded efforts. However, recommendations are made that additional focus be given to key items that proved resistant to change.

**The Development of an Instrument to Assess Advocacy Intentions for School Health Education**

### **Beth Chaney, Michele Wallen, and David A. Birch**

**Background:** An overlooked group for school health education advocacy training is college students enrolled in personal health courses. They will be investors and stakeholders in the quality of public education, and the health and academic success of students. **Purpose:** In this article we present the process used to develop a theory-based instrument that can help to assess changes in intentions to advocate for school health education after exposure to an advocacy training intervention conducted with college students enrolled in personal health courses. The instrument constructs were developed based on Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). **Methods:** Researchers used a comprehensive instrument design framework, involving the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing and four stages of pretesting to develop and test the instrument items. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test the relationship among ordinal items in the Likert-type instrument and the constructs in TPB, which the items were developed to measure. **Results:** Fit indices for the structural model indicated that the proposed model provided a satisfactory fit for the data. Therefore, the final instrument consists of 53 items, measuring intentions of students to engage in school health education advocacy, as a result of implementing an advocacy-training lesson. **Discussion:** This study resulted in an instrument to measure the effectiveness of an advocacy-training lesson for college students that produces valid and reliable scores. **Translation to Health Education Practice:** The instrument development processes can be replicated by practitioners when creating surveys to administer in their respective populations.

### **Use of Family History Information for Neural Tube Defect Prevention: Integration into State-based Recurrence Prevention Programs**

#### **Ridgely Fisk Green, Joan Ehrhardt, Margaret F. Ruttenber, and Richard S. Olney**

**Background:** A family history of neural tube defects (NTDs) can increase the risk of a pregnancy affected by an NTD. Periconceptional folic acid use decreases this risk. **Purpose:** Our objective was to determine whether second-degree relatives of NTD-affected children showed differences in folic acid use compared with the general population and to provide them with folic acid education. **Methods:** Michigan and Colorado health workers contacted families with a previous pregnancy or child affected by an NTD, identified through NTD recurrence prevention programs. Families were interviewed to identify the number of second-degree relatives of child-bearing age. Families mailed surveys to these relatives, who returned them to the state health departments. The survey assessed folic acid use, views on having an affected child, and reproductive planning. Folic acid education materials were sent to relatives who provided contact information. **Results:** Folic acid supplement use among relatives was similar to that of the general population, despite elevated risk perceptions. **Discussion:** Both state health departments plan to increase efforts to contact affected families and their relatives through partnerships with family support groups. **Translation to Health Education Practice:** Including outreach to second-degree relatives in NTD recurrence prevention programs could increase the impact of these programs.

### **Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Review of the Literature for Health Educators**

**Maureen K. Johnson and Mary Ruth Carter**

According to Healthy People 2020, one population confronted with health disparities is that of individuals living with disabilities. Among these individuals are children living with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). Increasing numbers of children in the United States have been diagnosed with ASDs, a group of developmental disorders for which no specific cause or cure has been conclusively identified. Increasing media exposure as well as legislation addressing ASDs reflects the increasing awareness of ASDs as a significant public health issue. However, whereas ASDs have become an issue of great interest to the general public, the amount of health education literature addressing autism spectrum disorders is extremely limited. This paper provides health educators with a review of literature concerning autism spectrum disorders, specifically its background, prevalence, possible causes, symptoms and diagnostic methods. Furthermore, the potential roles played by health educators in serving individuals (e.g., parents, educators, medical providers) who support children with ASDs is suggested through the application of National Commission for Health Education Credentialing, Inc. responsibilities and competencies for health educators.