

Bronx Health REACH News

Winter 2009

MAKING HEALTH EQUALITY REALITY

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Making Health Equality a Reality

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A Letter from Our Project Director



Dear Readers,

President Barack Obama has made health care reform a priority this year. Here in the Bronx, the Bronx Health REACH Coalition has been fighting for our own health reform for a very long time, and it is time we see results.

The health reform we are fighting for is the elimination of the separate and unequal care that people on Medicaid or people who are uninsured get in contrast to people who have private health insurance. We have seen that if you need to see a specialist at a private hospital in the city, your health insurance will determine whether you are seen in the clinic or in a private doctor's office. This separation into two unequal systems of care is a form of racial segregation since many uninsured and Medicaid patients are racial and ethnic minorities.

In June 2008 Bronx Health REACH filed a complaint with the New York State Attorney General's office against three hospitals that provide this segregated care. Attorney General Cuomo agreed to take on our case, but 18 months have passed and not much has happened. While we hope that the Attorney General will do something about this problem, we have not stood idly by waiting. We have continued to inform our friends, neighbors, family members, fellow church members, and others about this problem. And we haven't stopped there; we have also begun talking to elected officials about the issue.

As you read on the following pages about many of the things that Bronx Health REACH is doing to bring about change we hope you will be encouraged to join us. We need you! We need your ideas, your voices, your actions and your support. Whether you have private or public insurance, the separate and unequal system hurts us all. In last year's Presidential election, we witnessed how a group of people who said, 'Yes we can,' and who believed it and acted on that belief made the impossible possible. Against the power of a community determined to bring about fairness and justice neither Attorney General Cuomo nor the hospitals practicing this unequal system of care will prevail.

Join us. Together we can make health equality a reality.

Sincerely,

Charmaine Ruddock, MS
Project Director, Bronx Health REACH

Segregated Care Movement Attracts Media Attention

by Ruchi Mathur, Program Associate, Bronx Health REACH

In July, Bronx Health REACH was featured in a two part investigative news segment on CNN's Anderson Cooper 360'. Dr. Sanjay Gupta reported the story. The piece focused on the story of Rev. Gary Spears who shared his experience of seeing doctor after doctor who failed to recognize that a serious infection in his finger and his extreme weight loss was caused by his undiagnosed diabetes. Gupta used Rev. Spears' story and interviews with other coalition members to shine a light on the issue of segregated care in NYC private hospitals.

CNN also reported on our complaint to the NYS Attorney General. CNN staff contacted the hospitals named in the complaint and the Attorney General to get their side of the story. As CNN reported, the Attorney General's office refused to provide CNN with any information about the status of the case and the hospitals all referred CNN to the Greater New York Hospital Association (GNYHA). A spokesperson for the GNYHA said that it's unfair to blame hospitals for the black and white health gap. In a written statement, the spokesperson pointed out that the outpatient clinics offer care for the poor, "where it otherwise does not exist."

We are very thankful to Dr. Sanjay Gupta and CNN Producer Caleb Hellerman for their investigation into our complaint. Not only did the CNN report raise national awareness of the separate and unequal care that is provided in NYC private hospitals, but it also

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REACH Increases Awareness About Health Disparities

by Ruchi Mathur, Program Associate, Bronx Health REACH

Earlier this year, REACH held the first of a three part Health Disparity Workshop series. Over 60 coalition members attended in total. Initially, many participants stated that they had never experienced health disparities. However, through role plays and discussions, many soon realized that health disparities can occur in many different ways. We discussed language access and our right to quality health care regardless of insurance status. Many participants reported walking away feeling empowered and energized to take action with their own health care and to tell others about what they had learned.

This workshop was developed as part of our segregated care campaign at the request of coalition members who felt that they needed to be better informed to talk to others about our campaign and health disparities. One Faith-Based coordinator echoed the sentiments shared by many when she stated, "I am hearing so many different things about health disparities. Is it a disparity if someone at the front desk is rude to you or if a doctor doesn't examine you properly? What is health disparity anyway?" After working on eliminating health disparities at the community level for over



Workshop participants share their experiences of health disparities.

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Dr. Neil Calman Honored at Annual NYLPI Luncheon



Nisha Agarwal presenting the Felix A. Fishman Award to Dr. Neil Calman.

In November, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) honored Dr. Neil Calman with the Felix A. Fishman Award for his outstanding work and advocacy on behalf of underrepresented New Yorkers. As Nisha Agarwal, who presented the award on behalf of NYLPI, said, "Dr. Calman's amazing contributions as a physician are hardly what one would call "unsung"...however none of the many accolades Dr. Calman has received properly communicate his most significant contributions... Dr. Calman has courage. The courage to call out racism in the health care system when it is there... Dr. Calman has been unafraid to look inward to the profession of which he is a part and engage in revolt against those aspects of it that he finds morally repugnant... The struggle against injustice requires people willing to say uncomfortable things to their friends and themselves. I am so pleased that health care has such a discordant voice in Dr. Calman." ■

Health Disparities continued

ten years, hearing this question made us realize that while we use the phrase health disparities, we incorrectly assume that everybody knows what it means.

This workshop series helped new and old coalition members alike find their voice to raise awareness about the health disparities or inequalities in health care that are all around us. As a result, many participants wanted to do something with this new information and they formed a Health Disparity workgroup.

Over the past few months the group has been meeting regularly to discuss how to raise community awareness about health disparities. The group's first action was to meet with elected officials. So far, twelve workgroup members met with Assemblymen Nelson Castro, Adam Powell, Marcos Crespo, and Michael Benjamin to gain their support for our campaign for health equality. The members left the meetings very excited because all the Assemblymen were very interested in the issue and wanted to know how they could become involved.



Lorna Castro-Morales and Emma Torres discuss health disparities.

In the coming months we will continue to reach out to elected officials as well as others in our Bronx community. If you were unable to make past workshops, but are interested in joining the workgroup, or would like copies of materials from the workshop contact REACH at 212-633-0800 ext 1232. ■

NYLPI Succeeds on Toxic Schools and Language Access

By Suzanne Goldblatt, Project Coordinator, Bronx Health REACH

Our coalition member, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) have had several exciting successes in the past year. On October 16, 2009, the Bronx Supreme Court affirmed its 2008 decision that the City violated state environmental law by approving the contaminated Mott Haven Schools Complex without allowing the public to meaningfully participate in the environmental review process.

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National REACH Coalition Fights for Health Disparities

by Charmaine Ruddock, Project Director, Bronx Health REACH

The National REACH Coalition (NRC), an umbrella organization formed in 2004 to represent the interests of all REACH communities across the country, has become very visible on Capital Hill as its members educate Congress members about the need to prioritize the elimination of health disparities as part of national health care reform. Members of the Coalition provided testimony to the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies, solicited support from health reform leaders in both Houses of Congress, and held discussions on health disparity with appropriate staff from the White House and the Office of Management and Budget. Members also spoke at a meeting held by the Department of Health and Human Services on the need to invest monies from the stimulus funds set aside for Prevention and Wellness into the work REACH communities are doing. The coalition also sponsored webinars and conference calls with some of the nation's leading thinkers on topics ranging from the impact of transportation policies on the health and well being of poor minority communities to access to healthy, affordable food.

The hard work of the Coalition has had some very notable successes. For the first time money was put in the President's budget to support the expansion of REACH's work. In addition, both the Senate and the House of Representative's budgets had additional monies for REACH. NRC members meeting with members of Congress or their staff were happy to hear that many were aware of the work REACH has been doing in creating healthier neighborhoods and improving the health of constituents in their congressional districts. The Coalition was successful in getting the Congressional Black Caucus to put language about eliminating health disparity in the House of Representative's draft health reform legislation. While that language was removed from the final version of the health reform legislation, the NRC is committed to continue educating the leaders in Washington about the many issues contributing to the poor health of minority communities and to present them with meaningful solutions to those problems. ■



Nutrition & Fitness Workgroup addresses Children’s Eating Habits

By Diana Mosquera, Program Assistant, Bronx Health REACH

This past summer, the Bronx Health REACH Nutrition and Fitness Workgroup completed a study examining attitudes and behaviors related to consumption of healthy food among fourth and fifth grade children attending MARC Academy in the Bronx. Specifically, we gathered information on dietary behavior; attitudes towards healthy eating; fruit and vegetable consumption; and perceived challenges to eating healthy foods.



Students at MARC Academy participating in a PhotoVoice Session.

This research project came about after an attempt at promoting healthy snacks in schools and bodegas fell below our expectations. The committee then decided to revisit our approach and incorporate social marketing research techniques to learn how to better influence eating behavior. After months of research development and planning, the Nutrition & Fitness Workgroup was happy to complete the first

phase of the study in partnership with the New York Academy of Medicine.

A combination of interviews, surveys, focus groups, food journals, and PhotoVoice were used to collect information from MARC Academy children, parents, teachers, and school staff. The focus groups and surveys involved interactive games and activities to effectively engage fourth and fifth grade school children. Food journals were used to keep track of the foods that the children ate. PhotoVoice, a research method involving cameras and group discussion, allowed the children to creatively answer questions about food preferences and packaging.

Results from the survey showed that students generally enjoy eating fruits, but not vegetables, although there was some variation. Findings from the student focus group revealed that most of their families cook dinner at home and most students get some input, but not the final say in what is prepared for dinner. In the parent focus group, however, participants mentioned frequently ordering take-out or purchasing pre-

packaged meals for family dinners. Barriers to preparing healthy food at home included busy work schedules, single parent homes, and fatigue. Several parents also blamed the lack of fresh, affordable produce available for purchase in the Bronx. From PhotoVoice, we learned that students gravitate towards sweet snacks and drinks, as well as fast food options. Through a PhotoVoice session on food packaging, we learned that children prefer packaging that shows a detailed picture of the food inside the package.



When asked what he/she liked about fruits and vegetables in a PhotoVoice session, one student responded: “I like coconut because on a hot summer day all the icy men come out and the coco icy is the best.”

This first phase of our social marketing formative research gave us great insight into the many influences on the eating behavior of fourth and fifth grade children. In the next few months, we plan to share our findings with others interested in children eating health food. We will discuss with them how to use the results of this study to develop a marketing campaign aimed at encouraging children to make healthier food choices.

For more information about the study or a copy of the report, please contact our office at 212-633-0800 x1232. If you would like to join the REACH Nutrition & Fitness Workgroup, please contact Ruchi Mathur at 212-633-0800 x1364 to find out about our next meeting. ■



MARC Academy Students at the end of a focus group.



Community Health Advocate Initiative Comes to an End

by Ruchi Mathur, Program Associate, Bronx Health REACH

In October, the nine year long Bronx Health REACH Community Health Advocate (CHA) Initiative ended. Over the past few years, community members trained to do diabetes education have worked with small business owners and community organizations to provide health information and health screenings to the South Bronx. Community Health Advocates developed relationships with the owners of barber shops, hair and nail salons, and laundromats in order to bring vital health information about diabetes, nutrition and fitness to community members in settings that are comfortable and familiar to them.



HealthCorps member David Weiss conducting a blood pressure screening for a Bronx barbershop customer.

Last year, Bronx Health REACH partnered with the Black Barbershop Health Outreach Program to organize a free health screening and education. Over 50 barber shops across the five boroughs of New York City participated. In the Bronx, nine barbershops opened their doors to 18 medical and non-medical volunteers who successfully screened over 200

men, and even a few women, for diabetes and hypertension. The screenings and health information were well received by community residents. The barbers were vital in encouraging their clients to have their blood sugar level and blood pressure checked. One particular customer, uninsured and unaware of being at high risk for diabetes, couldn't thank the volunteers enough for providing him with the information he needed to seek further treatment and to get affordable health coverage.

This summer, in order to celebrate healthy eating and recognize our community partners, the CHA Initiative hosted its second annual "Healthy Habits Cookout" at the Sherman Avenue Community Garden at 163rd St. Community members and coalition partners enjoyed healthy foods, jump ropes, hula hoops and



Community Members enjoying fresh and healthy food at Sherman Avenue Gardens.

hopscotch on a beautiful summer day. Community Health Advocates handed out health education materials and talked to the attendees about the importance of healthy eating and regular physical activity.

Over the past nine years, the Bronx Health REACH Community Health Advocates have taught hundreds of Bronx residents about how to prevent, recognize and manage diabetes through activities like those mentioned above. Before the program ended, the advocates trained barbers and hairdressers to educate their clients about diabetes. ■



Community Member being physically active at the "Healthy Habits Cookout" in August.

Bronx Health REACH Goes to Africa

by Charmaine Ruddock, Project Director, Bronx Health REACH

In October, Bronx Health REACH was one of three CDC REACH grantees attending the 7th World Health Organization's Global Conference on Health Promotion in Nairobi, Kenya. At the opening ceremonies we were among more than 1000 participants representing more than 146 countries being welcomed to Kenya by Kenya's President Kibaki.



The CDC REACH Team in Kenya

The conference theme, "Promoting Health and Development: Closing the Implementation Gap," gave us an opportunity to learn what other countries outside of the US are doing about health disparities and to identify common areas of interests and challenges. During the workgroup session on Community Empowerment, Bronx Health REACH was invited to present on the work we are doing in the Bronx and to talk about the impact our community has been having on health disparities in our part of the world. People were so excited to hear about our work that one Canadian group asked if they could visit us to see us in action. ■

Segregated Care continued

made very clear that the NYS Attorney General’s office is not giving our complaint the attention it deserves.

The CNN coverage sparked the interest of the local media and as a result, the Project Director of REACH Charmaine Ruddock and lawyer and Health Director at NYLPI Nisha Agarwal were interviewed on WBAI, an FM radio station. Many listeners who heard the interview called in to the station and the REACH offices to share their stories and experiences of unequal care. As a follow up, WBAI has invited us to come back and host an on air two part Health Disparity Workshop in early 2010.

To learn more and to become involved in our segregated care campaign activities, we invite you to attend our next Action Committee meeting. Contact Ruchi Mathur at 212-633-0800 x1364 for details. ■

Health Disparity Resources

Newly Released Articles on Bronx Health REACH:

- Sue A. Kaplan et. al. (2009). Stirring up the mud: Using a community-based participatory approach to address health disparities through a faith-based initiative. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved* 20(4), 1111-1123.
- Navarro, Amanda M. “A Multilevel Intervention Approach for Reducing Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Diabetes: The Bronx Health REACH Nutrition Evaluation Project.” *Diabetes and Health Disparities: Community-Based Approaches for Racial and Ethnic Populations*. Ed. Leandro C. Liburd. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, 2010. 345-373.

Contact our office at 212-633-0800 ext 1232 or visit www.bronxhealthreach.org for copies of these articles.

What Can I do?

Did You Know that separating patients into two separate and unequal systems of healthcare is **ILLEGAL**?

Imagine a health care system where **all** patients are seen in **ONE** place and treated the **SAME**!

Act Now! Join our coalition for health equality! Call 212-633-0800 x1364 for more details.

NYLPI Success continued

This recent ruling was issued in response to the City’s request that the court rehear the case. Fortunately, the court once again agreed with NYLPI. The decision is a victory for parents, teachers, and community members.

NYLPI was also asked to advise the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in creating national guidelines for choosing sites for school facilities. NYLPI is part of a select group charged with making recommendations to the EPA to identify and address important environmental issues in the sites of safe schools.

NYLPI’s other achievement was its successful pursuit of a civil rights complaint alleging that major New York City pharmacies violated civil rights laws by failing to provide interpretation services and translated medication labels for non-English speaking patients. The New York State Attorney General, Andrew Cuomo, announced a settlement that requires Rite Aid, CVS, Costco, Target, Duane Reade, A&P and Walmart pharmacies to provide free language assistance services. Medication counseling provided in a patient’s native language will prevent people from putting their health, or their children’s health, at risk by using medications improperly.

Nisha Agarwal, a staff attorney and Health Director at NYLPI was pleased with the settlement agreements, noting that “Federal civil rights law, New York state law, and New York City law all make it clear that pharmacies should provide translation services in order to ensure equal access.” The settlement requires that pharmacies make translated prescription labels available and that they ensure customers receive medication counseling in their primary language. NYLPI also worked with community-based organizations to draft and pass the Language Access in Pharmacies Act in the City Council, which codifies the Attorney General’s settlement agreements and was signed by Mayor Bloomberg in September 2009. The new law will go into full effect in June 2010. ■

Bronx Health REACH/ NY Center of Excellence in the Elimination of Health Disparities is a community-based coalition led by the Institute for Family Health. We are working to end racial and ethnic health disparities in the Southwest Bronx and throughout New York State.

For more information, please call 212-633-0800 ext. 1232 or visit www.bronxhealthreach.org.

