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Title
Virtual Community Outreach during the COVID-19 pandemic: addressing health disparities for vulnerable populations

Priority 1 (Research Category)
Community based participatory research

Presenters
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Abstract
Context: COVID-19 has worsened health disparities among vulnerable populations, including minority and non-English-speaking populations. Community outreach is an effective method to bridge the gap for those populations. Virtual Community Outreach (VCO) emerged as a novel and sustainable approach during the pandemic but is unstudied. Objective: 1) Evaluate the effectiveness and usefulness of VCO. 2) Assess impact on patient health literacy. Study Design: Prospective cohort study at a single site. Dataset: Anonymous survey data collected after each virtual community outreach meeting, May 2020-May 2021 (No July meeting). Excluded data from September 2020 meetings due to inconsistent survey questions. Population studied: Members of an email list commonly subscribed by Japanese in Pittsburgh. Only one survey accepted if multiple family members attended the meetings via one registration. Intervention: Virtual weekend meetings held monthly for two hours. Lectures provided by healthcare professionals about requested topics from previous participants, including how to schedule a healthcare appointment, COVID-19 vaccines, health maintenance in the pandemic. Outcome Measures: age group, gender, length of stay in community, satisfaction level and usefulness of VCO, self-assessed impact on health literacy, patient at our clinic or not, intention to establish care at our clinic. Results: Average attendance 12.6 families per meeting. Survey response rate: 86.2% (119/139). Respondent demographics: Female 71.1% (81/114), Age group 40-49 years old, 38.1% (43/113), followed by 30-39 years old 35.4% (40/113), Length of stay in Pittsburgh (median) 5 years. Satisfaction level with virtual outreach meeting “very satisfied” or “satisfied” 98.3% (117/119). Usefulness of virtual outreach meeting “very useful” or “useful” 96.6% (115/119). Among participants who received care at our clinic, 70.3% (45/64) reported VCO improved their health literacy, including their decision whether to seek care when symptomatic. Among participants who had never been to our clinic 81.3% (39/48) expressed intention to establish care with us. Conclusions: VCO can be a novel and useful method to improve health literacy for those with vulnerability during the COVID-19 pandemic. VCO also may expand primary care access to that population, as attendees meet clinicians through virtual lectures and learn about the clinic. Also, through VCO, the clinic can reach and recruit diverse patients.