



Background

Under-resourced communities are areas characterized as densely populated metropolitan areas with high levels of poverty, low income and low investment. People who live in these areas tend to have poorer health related outcomes. PAs have limited capacity to affect the social determinants for people living within these communities.

Community leaders in an under-resourced neighborhood sought to change the health outcomes for their neighbors. They collaborated with a PA with gardening knowledge to create a community garden. This is one case study of actions taken to build, develop and sustain a project that can potentially change physical and mental health outcomes for community members.

The neighborhood of City Heights in San Diego faces multiple health disparities. Not only is it a classic food desert with 30% adult obesity rate, it is one of the most impoverished neighborhoods in the county with 26% of the population living under the poverty level.



One weekly volunteer cohort after building garden beds

Description and Methodology

A group of City Heights residents collaborated with a PA-C/PhD student to build a community garden in an abandoned lot in order to demonstrate principles of growing food using organic practices. The PA-C/PhD understood that their role represented the authorities of medicine and academia. The PA aimed to incorporate key components of Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) to build and sustain the garden to include: (1) building trust, (2) finding a shared interest, (3) powersharing, (4) fostering co-learning and capacity building among partners, (5) building on existing strengths, (6) employing an iterative process, and (7) finding a balance between research and action for the mutual benefit of all partners.

Weekly hands-on workshops were co-led by community members, the PA and other master gardeners at no charge. The group built upon the strengths and cultural norms of the existing community to include prayer, acknowledgement of cultural lineage and ancestral connections to foodways as well as bringing everyone's voice into an opening and closing circle.



Fall Harvest of tomatoes, red tomatoes and cucumbers

Results

- From March 2020 to December 2020,
 - 85 community members participated in gardening classes.
 - Community members built 12 raised beds sourced soil.
 - Participants learned to start plants from seed and transplants.
 - Classes included building raised beds, sourcing soil, building compost, planting, transplanting, erecting greenhouses and rotating crops.
 - Community members who had never grown food before became leaders in teaching gardening principles to their peers.

Discussion

Leaders in under-resourced communities are looking for public health solutions. Physician Assistants can take a more active role in addressing the social determinants of health in the communities they serve by collaborating respectfully with leaders using principles of CBPR.

When PAs take on opportunities to partner in communities, it can build trust in the community and enable a two-way transfer of knowledge between PA and the community at large.

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References

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