

City of Portland- Minority Health Program-Latin@x Dental Project 2019-2020.

FINAL REPORT

Contacting Latin@x persons-

In order to contact Latin@x groups, outreach events were started, and flyers distributed by the end of 2019 in 2 churches with Hispanic parishioners: Sacred Heart(catholic) in Portland and the Seventh-day Adventist Church (protestant) in Westbrook. At least 3 more churches were contacted to explain in detail the dental project, but it was not possible to coordinate outreach events with the respective pastors.

Word of mouth was another way for people to become enrolled in the Latin@x dental project.

The requirements to become enrolled in this project were:

- Older than 21 years
- No dental insurance
- No dental appointments/procedures in the last 6 months
- Enroll as a patient with the GPH and work with its financial aid agent
- Patient agrees to be responsible for payment after financial aid
- Attend all scheduled dental appointments
- Willing to take care for her/his dental health with emphasis in prevention

The Latin@x Dental clients had the opportunity of attending two centers for dental services: Greater Portland Health (GPH) and University of New England (UNE)-Dental Hygiene Clinic.

Enrolling Latin@x persons in the Dental Project-

A total of 69 persons were enrolled in the Latin@x Dental Project at Greater Portland Health (GPH) from February to November 2020. Of the 69 clients, 65 continue to be GPH active patients up to this date. Contact was lost with 4 people as they never responded to phone calls, texts or WhatsApp messages. UNE services were not sought by the Latin@x clients as most of them did not have a PCP and GPH offering medical and dental services was more adequate and convenient. Also, UNE Dental Hygiene Clinic did not offer fillings, extractions, denture repair or emergency services. Finally, UNE dental services were closed for a few months due to Covid-19 and then during the summer as the dental students that are the ones providing the services were on vacation.

Person to person enrollment was initiated during February 2020. All clients were helped to fill up the GPH registration form and asked to sign a release of dental records to allow the Community Health Outreach (CHW) from the City of Portland review and discuss with the client the dental treatment plan and cost.

The registration forms were brought to 63 Preble St in Portland so the information could be entered in GPH electronic system. Initially all Latin@x Dental project clients were to be seen only at 63 Preble St (GPH homeless clinic- walk-in clinic) but after a few months they started to

be seen in other GPH locations form medical appointments. The GPH dental office though is located only at 63 Preble St. in Portland.

GPH asks us to follow a process when enrolling clients in the dental project: 1) Meet first with a GPH financial counselor to establish the cost for medical and dental services 2) Have a first appointment with a designated GPH primary care physician who will refer the patient for dental services. 3) Have an evaluation with a GPH odontologist and discuss the treatment plan as needed. During Feb and March 2020 many of these persons were able to have dental visits after meeting with the financial counselor and the PCP. For dental services GPH offered after the evaluation (including X-rays), cleanings, extractions and restorations. One important option was emergency dental appointments. Patients had the opportunity of walk-in into the dental clinic when in dental pain and they will be seen on the same day or next one. Also, patients could walk-in the dental clinic seeking for appointments and if there were openings, they could be seen the same day.

Covid-19

At the end of March 2020 GPH medical and dental appointments were put on hold due to Covid-19 risk of transmission to the community at large. Enrollments in the Latin@x Dental Project continue but now only by phone and the registration forms were faxed without signature to the GPH health centers -180 Park Ave, Portland 04102 or 100 Brickhill Ave in South Portland 04106- according to which location was more convenient for the patient. Telehealth medical visits started to be the way of seeing patients, and new patients met their PCP via zoom. This technology was completely new for many of the persons enrolled by the dental project.

Dental appointments were started again in late June and the Latin@x clients of this project were able to continue with evaluations and cleanings. For restoration services GPH was waiting for a special equipment that will avoid Covid-19 transmission. It finally arrived in July Due that all the Telehealth medical visits, were taking longer to schedule due to the amount of people waiting for appointments, Kathy Martin Dental Program Manager allowed the new GPH Latin@x clients to schedule dental appointments before seeing their PCP for the first time. Latin@x patients were then scheduled for dental appointments right after being registered electronically and a good percentage of them have had cleanings and finalized their needed treatments.

Dental appointments at GPH are now scheduling for January 2021 and the Latin@x of the dental project have been booking them.

Results

Up to today all of the 65 dental project clients have had evaluation appointments. Most of them have had cleaning or restoration appointments. Some are done with their treatment and will be having cleaning appointments every six months. Odontologists continue doing restorations to many of them and scheduling more appointments accordingly to their dental

needs. Sometimes dental cleaning was done before restoration, sometimes after. Extractions and fillings were very common treatments.

Of the total 65, three or four patients have more complex dental issues like root canals - diagnosed by X-rays- that usually happens when cavities are not taken care in a long time. The GPH dental office does not service root canals as this requires odontologists with a specific training. These clients were referred usually to Community Dental. Helped was provided for completing and faxing a registration forms to Community Dental as that is the only way to obtain an appointment.

Throughout these months was possible to observe and ask clients of this project about their experience during their medical and dental services. My impressions are below in terms of barriers and highlights.

Barriers

- The use of two last names in the Latin@x culture is very frequent but at the same time creates confusion when registering patients. I.e. Scripts were sent to pharmacies using the patient's second last name and the client that went picking up the med could not find the medicine because she/he used her/his first last name.
- It is very common the lack of clarity between health care entities and where to go for health needs. People do not differentiate between normal care, urgent, and emergency services and how that affects the cost of them. Confusion exists as well among Maine Medical Center, Mercy and GPH; MMC free care, Maine Care and health insurance. It was Important to remind clients that GPH services are not health care insurance services.
- Time management-People is very busy and do not use good reminders for their appointments. They work long hours, usually do not have transportation and don't see the problem of missing a health care appointment.
- Literacy levels-Three of the clients were illiterate, and all the communication needed to be via audio messages. A good percentage of the clients have elementary/very basic academic levels.
- Language barrier- GPH has one phone number for all the incoming calls and the recorded answering message is in English. Calling to make/cancel appointments or communicate with a nurse is not easy for the Latin@x community as the 99% of them hardly understand or speak English. The project created and sent a script as a text message to them to help navigate the answering system. Dialing #3 after the recorded voice answers will take them to a person. They will then ask for a Spanish interpreter. Not always this was possible to achieve. Sometimes the wait time for someone to answer was pretty long and leaving a message as prompted by the system conducted to a failed communication.
- Difficulty contacting clients- Contacting clients to make sure they are aware or attending their health care visits was sometimes hard. A good percentage ran out of minutes toward the end of their cell phone cycle and therefore they become inaccessible. This is

why most of them prefer to be reached by WhatsApp. Also, it seems that it is not in the culture to reply to text messages or to listen to voicemails. Immigration issues may also explain why Latin@x people don't always answer phone calls.

These are a mix of barriers some are cultural; some are due to educational levels and some are related to their lack of assimilation to this country. The gap is too big, but this people have character, strength, resilience, desire for a better life for them and their family and they work hard.

Highlights

- The Latin@x dental project gave a unique opportunity to all the people enrolled in the project to have medical and dental services at a low cost or no cost according to their income. A high percentage of all these clients have not have dental checkups for many years sometimes up to 25 years since they left their countries of origin. Health services are very costly in the U.S and none of the 68 enrolled persons had dental or medical health insurance.
- GPH has provided these group of Latin@x outstanding services including interpreters during medical or dental appointments or phone calls. Medical and dental appointments are reminded by mail, texts and emails.
- Almost all the clients were enrolled in the GPH financial assistance program-affordable care program. This meant that they will pay according to their income, a fixed amount for each medical visit and a fixed amount for each dental visits no matter what medical or dental treatment they were to receive. Dental appointments were a little bit higher in cost due to all the costly odontological supplies. The discounts were given in 4 categories A: \$10 medical and dental visit \$35; B \$15 and \$45; C \$25 and \$55; and D \$35 and \$65 People were very comfortable with the cost of the visits and especially because they could predict the cost of their treatments.

During the months this project was carried out, the Latin@x persons (all or a good number of them):

- gained meaningful knowledge of how the health care system works in the US;
- are more conscious in the importance of taking care of their health; The dental program provides education on dental health during the visits.
- became more knowledgeable to the importance of avoiding extractions as the only option vs other treatments that allow them to keep their teeth and maintain dental alignment.
- learned that cavities left untreated can become more complex dental problems like root canals
- are aware of the cost per medical or dental appointment and conscious to pay each visit to avoid big invoices.

- are becoming more respectful of scheduled appointments and to cancel when not able to attend them. They appreciate this opportunity of taking care of their health.
- appreciate having cleaning appointments every six months
- are more prepared when going to an appointment and asking their provider specific questions about their needs or fears.
- gained some technical training for example for zoom calls, and they are more comfortable now using electronic messages and text messages to communicate
- most of the 65 Latin@x dental project active patients seem comfortable navigating the GPH operational system.
- Felt more assimilated to the US culture

Final Report -Total Numbers. Nov 2019-Nov 2020*

Actions	Number
# of outreach events	4
# of people reached:	615
# of one on one sessions	372
# of people (enrolled)- who complete the paperwork application	79**
# of people connected with GPH's PCPs	96
# of people connected with GPH Dental clinic	213
# of people connected with UNE Dental Hygienist	0
# of people who met with Financial counselor/manager	77***
# of people enrolled and registered	69
# of people who received dental services at GPH	97
# of people who receive dental services at UNE Dental Hygienist	0

- During three to four months no medical or dental appointments were given due to Covid-19
- ** Some people enrolled but then decided not to continue
- *** Some people had more than one appointment to bring payment stubs
- Note: These number may be not be totally accurate. Once the patients felt comfortable with the GPH process for making appointments they become independent and following them all was not possible.

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