Abstract

Topic Area: Diversity and Culture

Cultural Interpretations of Asthma: Exploring Explanatory Models of Families, Key Informants, and Health Care Providers within Lowell’s Cambodian Community

Susan Reece, Linda Silka, Khan Chao, and Phuong Phan

Asthma morbidity and mortality have been on an upswing particularly in Northeastern United States. Urban areas and communities of color have been severely impacted by this disease. Among the target objectives proposed by the CDC, the NIH and Healthy People 2010 are to decrease morbidity, mortality, emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and school and work days missed due to asthma. Despite clearly defined recommendations for asthma care, guidelines for prevention, monitoring, and treatment are not followed by many patients and families. Barriers to adherence may relate to misunderstandings between providers and families of the meaning of symptoms, the causality of the illness, and the treatment of the disease. This interdisciplinary community-based project has three major objectives: to promote culturally competent asthma care with Cambodian families; to provide asthma information and education to Cambodian families living with asthma and to members of the Cambodian community; and to impart important cultural insights to health care providers at large.

Little exists in the literature of the Cambodian perspective on asthma. In order to learn more about this cultural group’s view, we will be using the Explanatory Model framework of Kleinman (1980). Participants will include 20 Cambodian families with a young child with asthma, 10 key informants (such as clergy, community workers), and 10 health care providers. Once enrolled in the project, parents or guardians will be interviewed in their preferred language using the eight questions of the Explanatory Model as proposed by Kleinman. The eight open-ended questions center on etiology/causality of asthma, onset of symptoms, pathology, severity and views on treatment. They will also be asked what they believe would assist them in caring for their asthmatic child. Interviews will be tape-recorded and transcribed. In the second phase of the project, key informants and providers will be asked to read a case study exemplar of a Cambodian child with asthma. They will also be interviewed using the eight questions derived from the Explanatory Model. Data will be analyzed separately by group (family, key informant and provider). During data analysis, the researchers will search for within-group themes. Once all responses are analyzed, thematic outcomes of the three groups will be compared and contrasted. At the conclusion of the project, focus groups and informational sessions/exchanges will be held for the family participants and key informants in order to validate the themes and to bring back to these participants insights and education about asthma and asthma care. An additional informational session will be held for health care providers in order to increase their competency in providing care to this cultural group within the Lowell community.