Mapping a Strategic Plan for Health: Community-Based Participatory Research with Underserved, Low-Income, Urban Neighborhoods

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Since 2002, community-based participatory research methods have been used by the Calvin College Nursing Department to map out a strategic health plan for three urban, low-income, underserved neighborhoods. Community-based participatory research is a collaborative approach to inquiry, in which community and academia are co-teachers and co-learners (Anderson, Calvillo, & Fongwa, 2007; Heffner, Zandee, & Schwander, 2003). It emphasizes shared power, building community capacity, and joint research with the goal of action, to improve the health of the community (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003). Nine focus groups and 449 door-to-door health surveys were completed across the three urban neighborhoods between 2002 and 2004.

Neighborhood meetings were held to share the results of the research, and to give residents a platform to identify the top five health concerns for their neighborhood along with recommended solutions. Neighborhood strategic plans were then collaboratively written documenting the baseline research, and linking the resident-driven health concerns and solutions with nursing student learning experiences across the nursing curriculum. The top health concern identified by all three neighborhoods was lack of access to health care. The resident-driven solution addressing this issue was development of a Community Health Worker Program. Residents would be trained in basic health care and would work with nursing students to promote health and access to care in the neighborhood. The Community Health Worker Program was identified on the strategic plan as a strategy to promote access to care, and was initiated in the three neighborhoods in 2005. Evaluation measures were outlined in the strategic plan to measure effectiveness of the collaborative program.

Between 2009 and 2011, students and Community Health Worker Program members collaborated to complete the same research process of focus groups and door-to-door surveys as
initiated in 2002. Neighborhood meetings were conducted to disseminate the research results, review the top five health concerns, recommend solutions, and update the strategic plan. Results showed that emergency room use and barriers to health care decreased in the three neighborhoods between 2004 and 2011; access to dental care increased. Combining community-based participatory research with written strategic plans was found to be a useful strategy to unite community members, nursing students and faculty members, and neighborhood organizations in a long-term partnership addressing resident-driven health concerns and solutions in urban underserved neighborhoods while educating nursing students.

References


About the Author
Gail Zandee is the community partnership coordinator and assistant professor of nursing at Calvin College. Her research interests include health promotion, health disparities, social determinants of health, access to health care, and community health workers. Zandee earned her BSN from Calvin College and her MSN from Wayne State University.
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Introduction

In 2002, the Calvin College Nursing Department initiated a community-based nursing curriculum. To support this curriculum and to help Nursing students develop communication, community organizing, and leadership skills, the College Community Health Outreach (CCHO) Research Group was established. CCHO serves to enhance the health and well-being of the community through student-led research aimed at identifying and addressing community health problems. The CCHO Research Group has provided valuable information to health professionals and community leaders to support evidence-based health promotion practices. The current study examines the effectiveness of a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach in identifying and addressing health needs at the community level. The study aims to improve the health of underserved, low-income, urban neighborhoods by conducting focus group research and developing a strategic plan for health improvement. The results of this study will contribute to the development of effective strategies for improving health outcomes in underserved communities.

Background

Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is a collaborative approach to inquiry that is driven by the health needs of the community. It involves the participation of community members as co-researchers, ensuring that research is relevant, feasible, and sustainable. CBPR promotes health equity by involving the community in the research process, thereby improving the health and well-being of underserved populations. The CCHO Research Group has conducted several CBPR projects in collaboration with community partners, resulting in valuable insights and actionable solutions for community health improvement.

Neighborhood Survey

Focus Groups

Focus groups conducted by the CCHO Research Group in 2002 identified health issues in the neighborhood. Participants shared concerns about access to health care, mental health, and substance abuse. The CCHO Research Group designed a strategic plan based on these findings, aiming to improve health outcomes in the neighborhood.

Barriers to Health Care

- Access to health care
- Cost of healthcare
- Transportation
- Language barriers
- Cultural differences

Strategic Plan

- Increase access to healthcare services
- Implement community health education programs
- Address mental health and substance abuse issues
- Improve transportation infrastructure
- Provide language translation services

Top Health Concerns

- Mental Health/Depression
- High Blood Pressure
- Alcohol/Drug Abuse
- Healthy Eating
- Obesity
