

Family History Demonstration Project among Urban Appalachian Women

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Background: Family health history (FHH) is promoted to the general public as a genomics tool to improve health and prevent disease. Although FHH tools and resources regarding the importance of FHH exist, few resources target individuals with low literacy skills.

Methods: We partnered with six community organizations to develop a model program to educate urban Appalachian women with less than a college education about the collection and use of their FHH. Participating community organizations invited eligible women of Appalachian heritage to participate in two education sessions (spaced two weeks apart) about FHH. Our objectives by the end of the first education session were for all participants to 1) record their FHH using the Surgeon General's "My Family Health Portrait," 2) identify the importance of FHH in promoting health and preventing disease, 3) explain how to access "My Family Health Portrait" using the internet, and 4) identify at least four relevant questions to ask relatives to collect their FHH.

Results: A total of 100 eligible women between the ages of 19 and 70 attended one of 12 of the first education sessions. Fifty-one participants had less than a 12th grade education, 37 had a 12th grade education or GED, and 11 had attended some college. Most participants (90%) had children, and 78% self-identified as white while 18% identified as black.

Approximately half of the participants chose to record their FHH using the paper version of "My Family Health Portrait" and half chose the electronic version. All participants were able to identify reasons they felt it important to collect their FHH. The most common reasons were to "learn about health problems that run in my family" (96%) and "to pass information on to my children" (91%). Sixty-three percent of the participants felt they had enough training to find the Surgeon General's FHH form on the internet. Nearly all participants (95%) were able to identify at least four relevant questions to ask relatives about their FHH.

Discussion: After attending one education session, urban Appalachian women with less than a college degree were able to successfully complete their family health histories using "My Family Health Portrait." However, only 63% of participants felt they could find the Surgeon General's FHH form on the internet, suggesting access to the FHH tool may be a barrier for women with low literacy skills.

Key words: family history, Appalachian, low literacy, community, My Family Health Portrait