Finding Healthy in Affordability
Courteney Tucker

Introduction

As part of my schooling at the University of Rhode Island’s College of Nursing, I completed a community health rotation in the fall of 2010. During this rotation, I was given the task of completing a semester long project on something that I felt my aggregate site was in need of. I had the privilege of being placed at the Cranston Head Start for my aggregate site, and had the pleasure of working with the school nurse and a classroom of about 20 three to five year olds.

The problem identified within the first few months of being at Head Start was childhood obesity, which reflects a growing trend in American society. While attending a Health Advisory Committee meeting at the Head Start, I learned that there was concern about the number of overweight children in the program. Meredith Artigas, Head Start’s registered dietician, told the committee that 43% of the children at Head Start are overweight or obese. She felt that Head Start needed to be more pro-active at addressing this problem with families.

The committee also discussed the possibility of incorporating nutritious, affordable meals into my community health project so that the families would have a variety of meals to choose from throughout the weeks. One of the mothers who attended the meeting spoke up and said that one of the hardest parts of being on a tight budget is having to get creative with the meals. She said, “you find yourself relying on the same types of meals, and then of course your family complains so you pick up the frozen dinners, pizza, fast food, etc.” This sparked my interest of turning this idea into a separate project. I felt that the senior honors project would be the best way to do so.

Background

Childhood obesity has become one of the biggest public health crises to hit America in quite some time. Diseases we once saw only effecting adults, such as diabetes type II, have undoubtedly risen to new heights in children, sweeping some of the top childhood diseases that have been around for decades. It is well known that with lower socioeconomic status comes the struggle to balance budget and a healthy lifestyle.

“Head Start is a federally funded program created in 1965 in an effort to combat poverty. The program offers a wide range of services to low-income children aged three to five years old. Children receive comprehensive services that provide for the education,
health and emotional growth of the child. Services provided include: health, dental health, mental health, and nutrition. In addition, Head Start provides services for families including intensive social services, parent education programs and opportunities for parents to become actively involved in the Head Start program. Both Head Start and Early Head Start focus on the entire family, not just the child” (Rhode Island Head Start Association, n.d.).

Community health nursing is “a field of professional practice in nursing and in public health where technical nursing, interpersonal, analytical, and organizational skills are applied to problems of health as they affect the community” (Martins, 8 Sept 2010). One of the tenets of community health nursing is to “promote a healthful environment” (Martins, 8 Sept 2010). This project not only helped to fulfill that tenet, but also aided in implementing the Healthy People 2020 objectives, which includes “promoting health and reducing chronic disease risk through the consumption of healthful diets and achievement and maintenance of healthy body weights” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011).

**Aims, Objectives, & Rationales**

The goals for this project were on both a personal level and a community level. Personally, I wanted to be able to continue expanding my knowledge in the field of community health nursing. This included gaining knowledge about resources that would help me to translate the recipe books into Spanish, which some of the families would need in order to understand the information. It is my hope that this will also aid me in my future career as a registered nurse because the hospital I work at has a large population of Hispanic patients.

Since I work on a labor and delivery unit, good nutrition is an important component of healthy families and babies. This project gave me the opportunity to increase my knowledge on nutrition, a major issue on my unit and one that we strive to educate our patients about before they are discharged home with a baby. It also allowed me to continue using the nursing phases (i.e., assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation) utilized during the community health project. My skills in communication and working with a community were tested, but improved throughout the course of this project.

On a community level, I was able to assess exactly what it was that the families were in need of in terms of nutrition, and what helped them to make the most out of their resources (i.e., what types of foods they like to cook with, what ingredients are most
prominent, what ingredients they can afford). This portion required me to go to their local grocery store and compare prices between different ingredients, gaining knowledge on what these families are able to afford. This project also allowed me to be able to give back to a community in need.

The ultimate rationale behind this project was to gain information on skills and resources that would help me to better educate and communicate with my future patients as a registered nurse. What makes this project original is the idea of using a compilation of 68 recipes to educate a community on more nutritious, affordable ways to feed their families, while at the same time educating myself on ways to improve my communication and educational skills with my patients.

Progress Prior to Project

My community health lecture and clinical component this past fall semester gave me a base of knowledge within the field of community health. Two assignments, the windshield survey and the community health project, allowed me to better understand the Head Start community and their needs. Last semester, I generated about 15-20 recipes from Head Start staff members and from the University of Rhode Island’s Hunger Center, which I utilized during the creation of my final product.

Undergraduate Research Grant

I applied for a research grant in the beginning of the semester through the Undergraduate and Graduate Research Grant Committee. Fortunately, the committee selected my proposal and I was awarded full funding to support the expenses of my project.

Procedure

I worked with my project mentor, Meredith Artigas, Head Start’s registered dietitian to complete this project. Along with using the internet to search for recipe ideas, I also sent a letter to friends, family, and the staff and families of Head Start asking for any recipe contributions. The collection portion was completed between February 1st and March 14th.

Once I compiled about 80 recipes, Meredith and I assessed the nutritional value of each one. To assess affordability, I went to Cranston’s local Stop and Shop to compare prices on the ingredients mentioned throughout the book. With this information, I then created a price list of every ingredient contained within the book so that families would be able to see how many
times each ingredient is used and how much each one is worth. This portion was completed between March 15th and April 3rd.

Once I made my final selections, I designed a recipe book that included a cover, table of contents, nutritional information, price list, and various types of recipes. I then utilized a translation resource through Microsoft Word that helped me to translate the book into Spanish, the primary language of a few of the families. I completed this between April 4th and April 17th. The books were printed and bound the week of April 18th. They will be presented to the families as a raffle prize at a health fair that Head Start is hosting at the beginning of next year.

Value of the Project

This project not only allowed me to further explore the field of community health, but also gave me the opportunity to gain knowledge on skills and resources that will help me to better educate and communicate with my future patients as a registered nurse. Since I plan on working in labor and delivery, it is imperative that I am able to educate my patients on the importance of proper nutrition. It is my hope that this project will aid me in improving my skills at educating and providing resources that will better my patients' health. Since labor and delivery services reach a very diverse population, I also wanted to gain knowledge on resources that I could utilize to enhance my communication techniques with future patients. My ultimate goal was to further explore this field so that I may provide the best care towards a very diverse patient population.

Resources


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