

INTRODUCTION: PARTNERED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH TO BUILD COMMUNITY CAPACITY AND ADDRESS MENTAL HEALTH DISPARITIES AND DISASTERS

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During a February 21, 1998 radio address, then President Clinton announced the launching of a new Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities Initiative. “By the year 2010, we must eliminate racial and ethnic disparities,” he said. “America has the best health care in the world... but we can’t take full pride in that system until we know that every American has the best health care in the world,” Clinton declared.

Americans are still struggling with how to make health, especially mental health, care treatment and delivery equitable for all groups. Despite ongoing efforts to eliminate health care disparities, they continue to exist. In fact, recent studies have found that mental health care disparities are increasing.^{1,2} In this special supplement, the articles present unique and important new findings on efforts where researchers directly partnered with community leaders and members from underserved communities to improve mental health care. Their collaborative efforts built community capacity to eliminate mental health disparities and to address disasters that had occurred in these underserved communities.

Traditional research methods are likely inadequate to solve the long-standing problems with disparities in mental health care because they do not adequately take into account community context. Community partnered participatory research brings the best and latest research techniques to the major issues affecting community health by bridging community expertise and rigorous academic methods to develop community-appropriate interventions. The origins of disparities lie in individuals, physical and social environments,

as well as health care and public policies. It is imperative that underserved communities participate equally in developing strategies that eliminate disparities. Herein, 13 articles provide cutting edge information on community partnered approaches toward improving mental health care.

Four articles focus on methodological issues essential for developing community partnered work. In *Community Based Partnered Research: New Directions in Mental Health Services Research*, we present findings from a national conference bringing together researchers and their community partners focused on eliminating mental health disparities. Second, *Partnered Evaluation of a Community Engagement Intervention: Use of a Kickoff Conference in a Randomized Trial for Depression Care Improvement in Underserved Communities* provides a leading edge perspective on bringing the community to the table to begin a community partnered randomized trial. In *The Partnered Research Center for Quality Care: Developing Infrastructure to Support Community-Partnered Participatory Research in Mental Health*, we describe a National Institute of Mental Health funded Center that supports diverse community partnered research efforts. Finally, in *Participatory and Social Media to Engage Youth: From the Obama Campaign to Public Health Practice* important new technologies for engaging communities are discussed.

Also in this special supplement, five articles focus on community partnered research conducted in post-Katrina New Orleans to aid recovery. In *Community Perspectives on Post-Katrina Mental Health Recovery in New Orleans*, com-

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munity members describe the challenges and lessons they learned in helping rebuild mental wellness, resilience, and recovery in New Orleans following Katrina. In *Building Capacity for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Delivery for Depression in Poor Disaster-Impacted Contexts*, work to implement a proven intervention for depression is described. In *Building Community Resilience through Mental Health Infrastructure and Training in Post-Katrina New Orleans*, a major program to improve the infrastructure to provide mental health services to the post-Katrina New Orleans community is described and evaluated. A large effort to provide collaborative care by integrating a novel role for community health workers into mental health teams is described in *Community-Based Participatory Development of Community Health Worker Mental Health Outreach Role to Extend Collaborative Care in Post-Katrina New Orleans*. Participants' experiences with this approach are described in *Opportunities and Challenges of Implementing Collaborative Mental Health Care in Post-Katrina New Orleans*.

Underserved communities have many strengths to build upon to

improve mental health. Among these assets in many communities is spirituality. In two articles, researchers describe an exciting new, community-partnered venture to holistically address unmet mental health needs in the Los Angeles African American community by integrating spirituality. In the first, *Project Overview of the Restoration Center Los Angeles: Steps to Wholeness – Mind, Body and Spirit*, we view the recommendations of an active planning committee's effort to address depression in the African American community in Los Angeles. Authors address the unique challenges and facilitators that arise with diverse partners and perspectives working toward a similar goal in *Addressing Unmet Mental Health and Substance Abuse Needs: A Partnered Planning Effort Between Grassroots Community Agencies, Faith-based Organizations, Service Providers, and Academic Institutions*.

Finally, two studies focus on the important area of community partnered research to improve the mental health of youth. In the first, *Effects on School Outcomes of Low-Income Minority Youth: Preliminary Findings from a Community-Partnered Study of a School*

Trauma Intervention, the authors provide data suggesting that treating trauma among youth improves academic performance. A second article, *Strengthening Families of Children with Developmental Concerns: Parent Perceptions of Developmental Screening and Services in Head Start*, addresses the important, yet controversial area of early child mental health screening, and provides important data on parent perceptions and concerns.

Together, these articles lay the groundwork for developing research necessary to truly eliminate mental health and mental health care disparities. Each article provides insights from both researchers and community members, a unique blend that moves beyond our current knowledge.

REFERENCES

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