Attitudes and Knowledge of Chagas Disease among Latin American Immigrants and Medical Providers in Georgia

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Background:
- Chagas’ disease (CD) affects 300,000 Latino immigrants [1]
- Cases increase in parallel with rise in immigration (28% increase since the year 2000) [2]
- Immigrants can transmit CD vertically via blood donation
- CD, usually asymptomatic, may lead to a dilated cardiomyopathy, megaesophagus, or megacolon and death.
- Only 11% of blood donors infected with CD have contacted CDC for treatment between 2007-2008 [3].
- Depending on specialty, up to 80% of physicians (of 421 surveyed) reported “never” considering a diagnosis of Chagas disease among their patients from endemic countries [4].

Populations Served:
- Hispanic communities in Georgia
- Medical Providers in Georgia who serve Latin immigrants

Project Goal:
Through qualitative analysis of focus group discussions with Latino immigrants and quantitative survey analysis of physicians this project examines 1) the barriers preventing CD positive donors from receiving evaluation and treatment and 2) what gaps exist in physician knowledge of CD and how can those gaps be addressed.

Expected Outcomes:
Collect and synthesize qualitative data from Focus Group Discussions to:
- understand the barriers to the prevention and treatment of CD among U.S. Latino immigrants
- quantify the knowledge and burden of CD among U.S. Latino immigrants, and
- identify effective health communication means to reach the Georgia Latin American immigrant population.

Collect and analyze a quantitative survey on CD for healthcare providers in order to:
- understand the barriers to the prevention and treatment of CD among medical providers who serve Latin American immigrants.

Project Timeline:

Aug-Dec 2011
- Draft Medical Provider (MP) survey protocol
- Complete community outreach from Community Advisory Board
- Complete 12 FGDs
- Develop and pilot MP Survey
- Analyze comparative data
- Survey MPs
- Analyze MP survey data
- Manuscript of FGD results
- Develop Latino Immigrant Health Resource Guide

Jan-May 2011
- Develop FGD materials
- Train FGD moderators

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Preliminary Results for Latino Immigrant Focus Group Discussions:

Knowledge of CD and Parasitic Diseases

There was a lack of awareness of CD, but some participants recognized the vector.

"I remember a little of that [picture of vector], they live in the trees and it is dangerous for the heart, the parasite"

"I understood that there are no parasites here. Right? In Mexico yes, in animals yes, in dogs yes, but here no."

"Chagas disease? What is that?"

Health Care Access

Common health problems mentioned were chronic diseases (Atlanta) and work-related sickness (farmworkers), but a range of problems were mentioned including mental health issues and sexually transmitted diseases.

"There is a lot of depression, mental health problems. Many illnesses that we don’t know, don’t understand."

Reasons for not seeking healthcare include structural barriers (immigrant status, cost, time, and language) and cultural beliefs (privacy, fear, carelessness, and prioritizing family over self).

"I thought I had problems in this breast. Then I was thinking for two months, where, where, where will it be the cheapest?"

"For me, the worst problem Latinos have is that we are immigrants, not legal."

"We, Latino men, are much more private, we don’t care enough to go to the doctor… and we are always afraid that he will tell us that we are ill."

Various alternatives to mainstream healthcare were used including waiting for symptoms to get better, emergency rooms, herbs, and black market doctors and pharmacies.

"There is a doctor that charges less for people with emergencies. I don’t know if he has a degree."

Health Information

Participants sought health information from pamphlets and the media, but most did not use internet.

Blood and Organ Donation

Opinions regarding blood and organ donation varied; most were willing to donate blood and organs but there were myths (gaining weight-blood, and being left to die-organisms) associated with donation.

"In the conferences, they also say that doctors won’t help you much because they want to give you your organs."

Citations Background:
3. What Happens to Blood Donors Who Test Positive for Chagas Disease? ed. CDC

Citations Pictures:
- Blood: http://t3.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcT4lVfIE0UMOUgAOFti8rrxEZ_e+h/gpQFb1no2qaileECSO
- Pregnant Woman: http://t1.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcSgP5MP2eqlFW6thB3k0y2enNDphNViOQ9RBDXjMyg77uFD8-jr
- Triatominia Bug: http://www.cdc.gov/chagas/ Herman’s Sign (eye):
http://assassinbug.files.wordpress.com/2010/01/figure1.jpg

Next Steps:
- Analyze of FGD data for publication
- Survey of Medical Providers in Georgia
- Analyze Medical Providers survey results
- Develop, pilot and collect survey for Latino immigrants in Georgia for FGD quantification
- Create Health Resource Guide for Latino immigrants in Georgia, incorporating findings of Medical Providers survey and FGDs

Project Partners:
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*The majority of us have children, can you pass it [Chagas] through pregnancy?"