

BACKGROUND: Refugees in the Triangle Area

Roughly 60,000 people immigrate to the United States as refugees every year. The Triangle Area alone resettles over 800 of these individuals or families(1,2). These people come from a wide variety of countries including Burma, Bhutan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Iraq. In many cases, they have limited access to health information and little to no idea about how to obtain health care in the United States.

Refugee Health Initiative (RHI) is a new program at Duke that seeks to provide longitudinal in home health education and to improve access to care for newly resettled refugees in Durham, NC. The program began at UNC Chapel Hill four years ago and was expanded to Duke with support from the Albert Schweitzer Fellowship and in partnership with Church World Service, a refugee resettlement agency. We have recruited Duke graduate students to provide longitudinal in home health education to the refugee participants.

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

As a whole, refugees face unique challenges coming to the U.S. Refugees and Immigrants often adopt American diets and realize higher rates of chronic diseases, such as obesity, the longer that they are in the U.S. (3,4). Additionally, because of their marginalized and traumatic background, refugee groups often have increased prevalence of undiagnosed conditions and face additional barriers to care(5).

Our community partner, Church World Service, a refugee resettlement agency here in Durham, North Carolina, recognized the need for a health education intervention focused towards newly resettled refugees in the Triangle area. They suggested a program that would introduce refugees to basic health information as well as would provide information about local health services.

PROGRAM

Goals: To assist newly resettled refugees in developing skills and knowledge related to the navigation of the United States health care system. We accomplish this through a series of in-home health discussions. The following list represents all of the possible topics of discussion. Topics are discussed based on the refugee clients' interests and needs

Session 1: Meet family, provide first aid kits, discuss family's health care goal(s).

Session 2: Organizing a physician visit

Session 3: Nutrition

Session 4: Exercise and Heart and Lung Health

Session 5: Communicable Diseases

Session 6: Family Planning

Session 7: Safety and Emergencies

Session 8: Drugs and Medications

Session 9: Dental Hygiene

Session 10: Mental Health

RESULTS

Through this program we have recruited 20 volunteers from the graduate and professional schools throughout Duke and have worked with 13 families from: the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Sudan, Vietnam, and Afghanistan. The program created 40 first aid kits to be distributed to newly resettled refugee families in the triangle area. In addition to following the RHI curriculum, volunteers provided the following services to the refugee clients.

	Activities
Health Care Access and Navigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2x Helped family apply for Medicaid 1x Helped sort out overdue bills 1x Helped family navigate bus system to get to the Public Health Department 1x Set up immunization and green card appointment 9x Helped make medical/dental appointment 3x Made notecards with written requests in English to help family navigate appointments
Use of Medications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7x Discussed proper use of medications
Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1x Helped with bus directions to grocery store 5x Discussed good nutrition 1x Discussed expiration dates for food items
Exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2x Showed family bus routes to safe parks and accompanied them there
Reproductive Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1x Helped family apply for WIC 1x Taught mother how to use infant formula
Mental Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2x Provided resources for mental health services
Dental Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1x Helped make Dental Appointment 2x Taught partners how to floss, dental education
General Health and Wellness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12x first aid kit given and explained 1x helped with housing application



Figure 1 (above): Results table demonstrating activities engaged in with refugee partners.

Photo 1: Trevor and Stephanie with refugee family and interpreter.



Photo 2: First aid kit making event in collaboration with Duke Nursing Students Without Borders

SUSTAINABILITY

RHI represents an opportunity for Duke medical students and Duke global health students to collaborate on a local volunteer project with a global focus. Volunteers for this program come from the many health professional graduate schools at Duke, including the school of medicine and the Duke Global Health Institute. Our plan for sustainability is to strengthen these ties in order to create a long lasting volunteer experience. In this coming year, the program coordinator will be a second year Master of Global Health student and the project will be folded into the Global Health Interest Group at the Duke School of Medicine.

REFERENCES

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