

EDITORIAL

HIV Among Drug Users in Puerto Rico: Evidence of a Public Health Emergency



As I read the executive summary for the Puerto Rican Drug Users in New

York and Puerto Rico: HIV Behavior Determinants study, written by my colleague, Milton Mino, I thought that it would be a good idea to share with you what he wrote, in order to present you the treatment gaps from an outsider's perspective. Here is what he wrote:

There is a public health emergency in Puerto Rico. Drug users in Puerto Rico are becoming infected with HIV at rates that are among the highest anywhere in the United States. In 2002, Puerto Rico had the fifth highest rate of new AIDS cases nationwide, and when compared by the size of its population, more people in Puerto Rico have been diagnosed with AIDS than anywhere else in the Caribbean. Yet Puerto Rico's AIDS epidemic, particularly among drug users, has progress relatively unnoticed.

This report presents the findings from a study that compared the HIV related risk behaviors and infection rates of 399 Puerto Rican drug users in Bayamon, Puerto Rico with 800 of their counterparts in East Harlem, New York, based on initial and follow-up interviews and HIV counseling and testing. Conducted by two teams of researchers at their respective locations and funded by the National Institutes on Drug Abuse, the study is among the most comprehensive ever undertaken on HIV risk behaviors of drug users in Puerto Rico. This report also includes findings on changes in Puerto Rico's drug treatment services, drawn from another studies.

Combined, they show that drug injectors in Puerto Rico are at significantly higher risk for becoming infected with HIV than those in New York, but that they have few prevention resources available to them. The HIV prevention programs that have been essential in reducing the number of drug users who contract the virus, such as methadone maintenance and needle exchange programs, are scarce in Puerto Rico, and the capacity of drug treatment programs overall are declining. Most important, the study found that drug users in Puerto

Rico who were HIV negative at their first interview became infected at rates more than four times higher than those in New York. And they died at rates that were more than twice as high.

The findings are troubling and show that there is a population of drug users in Puerto Rico who are at very high risk for becoming infected with HIV, but who have few and decreasing prevention resources available to them. Since injection drug use has been HIV's main transmission route into the non drug using and heterosexual communities, it also suggests that this epidemic will not stay limited to drug users, but can have significant health consequences on the broader population.

But HIV infections are preventable, and so this report concludes with a number of recommendations for public health and policy makers about what they can do to curb this health emergency. These steps include 1) increasing the number and funding of methadone clinics and other types of drug treatment programs, 2) adding resources for street outreach projects so that drug users can get tested for HIV and counseled on how to avoid becoming infected, 3) increasing medical treatment and access to medicine for those who are already HIV positive so that they do not get sick and so that they do not infect others, 4) developing an HIV surveillance system so that new infections can be monitored and resources directed to where they are most needed, and 5) increasing access to clean needles through pharmacies and needle exchange programs. Adding HIV prevention programs for drug users will reduce the number of people who become infected. In fact, the study found that drug users who had migrated to New York, where there are substantially more HIV prevention programs available, were much less risky than those in Puerto Rico in terms of their HIV risk behavior.

For more information, please contact us at (787) 785-4211 or prattc@uccaribe.edu.

Rafaela R. Robles
Directora del CHATTC

PROGRAMA ACADÉMICO

Trayectoria Profesional

Yarixa Vazquez-Marciano, MHS, Ex-Alumna



Al cumplir una de mis anheladas metas a nivel profesional experimenté muchas satisfacciones en el área personal. Aún recuerdo como la búsqueda incansable de programas graduados de calidad se convirtió en todo un proyecto. Como estudiante de bachillerato en Psicología, tenía la ignorante idea de pensar que estaba destinada a continuar por dicha disciplina si quería alcanzar un grado de competencia a nivel profesional. En aquel momento, me desempeñaba como coordinadora de un programa federal para la prevención del consumo de alcohol en menores. Este, me brindó la oportunidad de adquirir mayor conocimiento en el área de la adicción y de observar cómo, día a día, las estadísticas de uso, abuso y dependencia a sustancias psicoactivas estaban aumentando en Puerto Rico. Mi inquietud y asombro me llevaron a conocer sobre el Programa Graduado de Consejería de Abuso de Sustancias de la Universidad Central del Caribe. Hoy, a casi tres años de haberme graduado del mencionado programa, confío y reafirmo que mi decisión por continuar estudios graduados en el área de la adicción fue la más acertada.

Mientras estudiaba mi grado de maestría, fungía como consejera para una organización privada. Aún recuerdo como durante la entrevista de trabajo, la directora y fundadora de la organización me expresó lo beneficioso que le resultaba el que formara parte de su equipo de trabajo, ya que sería la única en poseer la preparación en el área de la adicción. Según verbalizó, eran muchos los llamados consejeros, pero pocos los que poseían una preparación académica. Demás esta decir que obtuve el empleo. Ya graduada de la maestría, me mudé al friolento estado de Minnesota. Allí solicité, competí y alcancé la posición de ACD Counselor@ (Chemical Dependency Counselor) para un programa ambulatorio que brindaba servicios de tratamiento a madres o embarazadas, sin hogar y con la terrible enfermedad de la adicción. Sin nada que envidiar, con mi ah, yes y ah, no presté servicios de terapia grupal e individual, discusión de casos y adiestramientos, entre otros. La diversidad en marcos teóricos, el saturado mercado de tratamientos farmacológicos y la competencia en ofrecimientos espirituales al momento de prestar servicios, se hacía notar, pero ninguno me resultó desconocido gracias a mi preparación académica. En la actualidad, trabajo para el Gobierno Federal y aunque no presto servicios directos de tratamiento, poseo la responsabilidad de discernir la necesidad de tratamiento y hacer referidos si así la persona lo amerita, garantizando una oportunidad de rehabilitación.

Administrar, coordinar, prestar servicios directos y referir fueron y son diversos roles que experimenté y continuo desempeñando. Sin embargo, todos convergen en un mismo fin...garantizar la oportunidad de tratamiento y rehabilitación a toda persona que sufra de adicción a sustancias psicoactivas.

Eventos y Actividades

El Caribbean Basin and Hispanic ATTTC ha estado muy ocupado durante los últimos cinco meses con múltiples viajes, talleres y reuniones. Por ejemplo, en septiembre, se lanzó el video Entérate en una conferencia de prensa con el alcalde de Bayamón, Hon. Ramón Luis Rivera, hijo. Esta conferencia de prensa se dio, muy apropiadamente, en la escuela elemental, Juan Morell Campos en Villa Rica, Bayamón y contó con la presencia del personal del CBHATTC así como de padres, maestros y alumnos, representando a la comunidad. Como parte de los esfuerzos de promocionar y aumentar el alcance “Entérate”, un grupo del personal del CBHATTC asistió a la conferencia de 2003 del Latino Behavioral Institute en Los Angeles, California. Además de la presentación del video, se llevaron datos de investigaciones recientes llevadas a cabo por el Centro de Estudios en Adicción. También en septiembre, el Dr. Carlos Jiménez presentó el taller Neuropsicofarmacología del Abuso de Substancias en las facilidades de Hogares CREA en Trujillo Alto. Este taller estuvo concurrido por personal de organizaciones de base comunitaria así como profesionales relacionados al campo de la adicción.

Luego, en octubre, se presentó el taller de Diagnóstico Doble, ofrecido por el Dr. Raúl Benítez, en las facilidades de los Hogares CREA en el barrio Venezuela de Río Piedras. Durante este mes, los investigadores del Centro de Estudios en Adicción se dirigieron a profesionales de la salud mental en la conferencia del National Association for Mental Illness (NAMI). En esta actividad, la Dra. Rafaela Robles, el Dr. Juan Carlos Reyes y Tomás Matos presentaron los hallazgos más recientes sobre los modelos de entrevista motivacional y cómo ciertos trastornos mentales pueden afectar la efectividad de ciertos tratamientos. Otra actividad llevada a cabo en el mes de octubre lo fue la reunión del Comité de Mercadeo para la 2nda Conferencia Nacional del CBHATTC que se llevará a cabo del 18 al 20 de agosto de 2004. Esta reunión asistieron representantes de la Guardia Nacional de Puerto Rico, organizaciones de base comunitaria y fe, agencias privadas y gubernamentales.

En noviembre, tuvimos la visita de la Directora Interina de la Oficina del Control de Drogas, perteneciente a la Oficina de Casa Blanca, Andrea Grubb Barthwell, MD, FASAM. La Dra. Barthwell vino a conocer al CBHATTC y llevar un mensaje a las organizaciones de base comunitaria sobre la política presidencial para el control de drogas en áreas como la prevención, intervención temprana y tratamiento. Una semana más tarde, se llevó a cabo la primera reunión de nuestra Junta Asesora en Islas Vírgenes, compuesta por representantes de agencias de salud de públicas, así como privadas y organizaciones de base comunitaria.



Primera Columna: Presentación del video Entérate con el alcalde de Bayamón, Ramón Luis Rivera, hijo; Taller en el Hogar CREA de Río Piedras; Dra. Edna Quiñones aclarando dudas del público en la Conferencia de NAMI.

Segunda Columna: Presentación del CBHATTC en Los Angeles, Conferencia del Latino Behavioral Institute; Dr. Carlos Jiménez en el taller de Neuropsicofarmacología en el Hogar CREA de Trujillo Alto; la Dra. Barthwell con Nancy Martínez de Consocio de Centros Cristianos, la Sra. Julia García de Hogares CREA y la Prof. Evelyn Feliberty del CBHATTC; Primera reunión del Comité de Mercadeo para la Conferencia Nacional a celebrarse en agosto de 2004; Primera reunión de la Junta Asesora en Islas Vírgenes.

2nd National Conference to be held on August

The Caribbean Basin Hispanic ATTC will be hosting its 2nd National Conference on August 18-20, 2004 in San Juan, Puerto Rico at the San Juan Marriott Hotel entitled "Understanding the Role of the Hispanic/Latino Family as a System of Drug Use Treatment and Prevention".

This year, the following speakers have been invited to present the conference's Plenary Sessions:

Nora D. Volkow, MD. - NEUROGENETICS

Dr. Volkow was recently appointed as Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse. She is the first Hispanic and first woman to hold this position. A Mexican-born physician, Dr. Volkow has dedicated her professional life to understanding how addiction changes the brain. Her studies have focused on neurochemical mechanisms responsible for variations in how individuals respond to drugs of abuse. She is considered to be among the scientists who have made the greatest contributions to the field of neuroscience, and her many publications and lectures have moved the science of addiction field forward immensely.

Keith Trujillo, Ph.D. - NEUROBIOLOGY OF ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOR

Dr. Trujillo is Professor of Psychology and Associate Director of the Office for Biomedical Research and Training, California State University San Marcos. His areas of expertise include psychopharmacology and the neural basis of drug abuse and addiction.

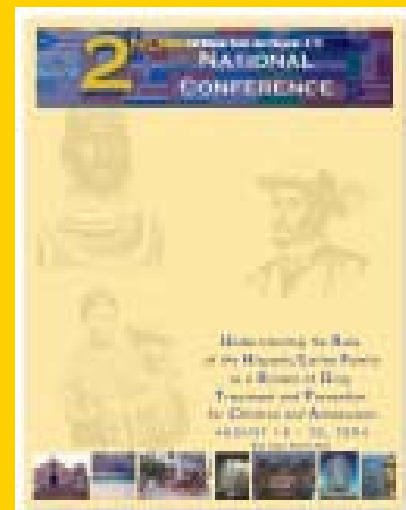
H. Westley Clark, MD, JD, MPH. - HELPING THE HISPANIC COMMUNITY AND THE HISPANIC FAMILY TO ADDRESS TREATMENT OF DRUG USE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES THROUGH CSAT/SAMHSA PROGRAMS

Dr. Clark, Director of the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), is a clinician and well-known researcher. In his present position he has met with representatives of numerous U.S. groups and organizations at all levels, to develop the new National Treatment Plan for addressing drug abuse in the new millennium. His basic interest in science as a researcher is evidenced through his support of the CSAT ATTC Network and our various Hispanic Initiatives undertaken to ensure that communities receive the latest scientific information in the drug abuse treatment field.

William Vega, Ph.D. - ADDRESSING FACILITATORS AND IMPEDIMENTS TO THE HISPANIC FAMILY'S ROLE AS A SYSTEM OF DRUG USE TREATMENT AND PREVENTION

Dr. Vega is a social scientist in the field of drug use and mental health. His work in the epidemiology of drug use among Hispanic adolescents, as well as his work in acculturation, familism, and other cultural elements of the Hispanic family, has earned him high esteem in the national as well as the Hispanic scientific community. Presently, Dr. Vega is Professor of Psychiatry at the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School-University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, and Director of Research at the Behavioral Research and Training Institute of University Behavioral Healthcare.

For more information on the **2nd CBHATTC National Conference** please contact Carmen Andújar, Conference Coordinator at our office telephone: 787-785-4211, fax. 787-785-4222 or e-mail: candujar@uccaribe.edu.



First Advisory Board Meeting at Tamarind Reef Hotel in the US Virgin Islands

Aymee Santana, Coordinator



On December 5, 2003, the first advisory board meeting of CBHATTC was held at the Tamarind Reef Hotel, St. Croix US Virgin Islands. Members from both the St. Croix and St. Thomas community based organizations, public and private agencies were in attendance and were introduced to the CBHATTC's roles, composition, objectives and upcoming events of the USVI office.

The needs assessment survey was distributed among a variety of agencies in St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John. Based on preliminary results of the needs assessment survey, discussed in the advisory board meeting, a

two-day motivational seminar will be held in March 17 and 18, 2004 on the island of St. Croix. Additionally, a motivational interviewing seminar will be arranged for the island of St. Thomas.

Along with covering the CBHATTC's office updates, the meeting concluded with discussions on improving services provided to the community through an exchange of knowledge of various demographics and individualizing training needs for various agencies. The result was the development of collaborating training seminars among agencies. On January 15-16, 2004, the University of Delaware sponsored "HIV/AIDS Prevention Research in International Settings" which was held at the Tamarind Reef Hotel on January 15 - 16, 2004. Within this conference, attendees from Brazil, South Africa, United States Virgin Islands, St. Kitts and Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine, St. Lucia, St. Martin, Russia and Tanzania discussed their findings on drug use and HIV risk behaviors, primary needs assessment of the urban homeless out-of-treatment drug using communities, HIV intervention for drug users, substance abuse sex workers and the emerging heroin epidemic. Such topics affect us as a whole and will be addressed at the Caribbean HIV/AIDS Conference in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic March 2004.



The Addiction Technology Transfer Center Network

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