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Revitalizing Alzheimer's Community Engagement in the RGV Post-Pandemic: Insights from the First Two Alzheimer's Forums

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Background

The Rio Grande Valley (RGV), with a population predominantly composed of Hispanic/Latinos (93%), faces a higher risk of Alzheimer's Disease (AD) compared to other groups. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the lack of education and awareness surrounding AD and related dementias in our community. To address these challenges, we partnered with the Alzheimer's Association to organize the first two Community Forums after the pandemic. Our goal is to raise awareness, provide resources, and support those affected by AD and related conditions in the RGV.

Methods

Through a proactive partnership, our objective was to meet the growing demand for education, resources, and support for individuals impacted by Alzheimer's. We hosted two Alzheimer's Community Forums on May 9th, 2023, at the UTRGV Harlingen Auditorium in Harlingen and May 23rd at UTRGV Salon Cassia in Brownsville. We used the Community Assessment Toolkit as guiding frameworks. These forums served as a dynamic engagement strategy, bringing together healthcare professionals, researchers, and community members to exchange valuable insights and information. With involvement from UTRGV teams, including marketing, we developed impactful marketing resources and invited UTRGV Community Partners to set up informational tables to promote resources for those impacted by dementia.

To maximize outreach, we distributed flyers and engaged in conversations with people on the streets. This grassroots approach attracted a significant number of attendees who signed in, allowing us to present crucial information and facilitate discussions. Our Community Partners generously donated door prizes to further incentivize participation and engagement.

Results

With the combined forums, we hosted nearly 60 participants, including caregivers, individuals with a family history of AD, community members seeking knowledge, stakeholders, and community health workers. Attendees who were previously unaware of AD and dementia research in the Valley expressed a commitment to prevention and participation in research, including their wish to become volunteers and advocates within their community. Approximately 28 potential participants expressed interest in enrolling in our study.

Having individuals willing to actively participate in research is crucial for advancing our understanding of AD and developing potential treatments and preventive measures. The forums have motivated people to become volunteers and advocates within their community, as their involvement can have a positive impact on increasing awareness and driving further research efforts.

Conclusions

The Forums provided attendees with increased knowledge and tools for AD awareness and support. Efforts should continue to bridge gender gaps and diversify attendee representation. This report documents the success and impact of these Alzheimer's community forums, aiming to inspire ongoing efforts to raise awareness and improve the quality of life for those affected by AD in the RGV. The strong partnerships forged with Community Partners demonstrated a lasting relationship that we hope will ultimately contribute to positive change in the impact of AD on the RGV and Latino/a community.

The forums have clearly had a meaningful impact on the community, fostering engagement, education, and a commitment to AD prevention and research. This outcome reflects the importance of providing platforms for knowledge sharing and community involvement in healthcare initiatives.