



Cancer, Culture and Literacy 5th Biennial Conference Solutions for Addressing Health Disparities Through Community Partnerships

May 18–20, 2006, Clearwater Beach, Florida

Conference Highlights

*Chrystyna Pospolyta, MPH, Dina Martinez, MA, MPH,
Janelle Menard, MA, MPH, and Cathy D. Meade, PhD, RN, FAAN*

In an effort to move the agenda on cancer health disparities research and outreach forward, the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute at the University of South Florida in Tampa hosted its Fifth Biennial Cancer, Culture and Literacy Conference — *Solutions for Addressing Health Disparities Through Community Partnerships* — on May 18–20, 2006, in Clearwater Beach. The conference theme and sessions focused on conceptual and methodological issues in community-based participatory research (CBPR) to create solutions for positively impacting cancer health disparities in the context of culture and literacy. A CBPR framework is necessary to build strong, lasting community partnerships and to effect collaborative participatory action for sustainable, positive health changes in the face of structural barriers to care.

Effective cancer communications and programs, as they unfold in diverse cultural and linguistic contexts, set the stage for much-needed participatory research in the area of cancer, culture and literacy. Our fifth biennial conference attracted more than 270 participants from 37 states, Canada and Panama. Participants included health educators, nurses, physicians, social workers, anthropologists, patient advocates, outreach workers and other health professionals seeking training in methods of CBPR as it applies to cancer health disparities in diverse populations.

On day 1, the conference began with five skill building preconference workshops that provided training and instruction in qualitative research methods, representative recruitment issues in

cancer clinical trials, education strategies for ethnically diverse communities, health policy assessment, and educational materials development relating to culture and literacy. Such topics provide the basis for bolstering skills and knowledge for impacting health disparities. The main conference was introduced by its organizer, Dr Cathy Meade, and began with a panel discussion, “Building Community Collaborations that Address Cultural and Literacy Realities,” that set the tone for the conference. Community partners from the Tampa Bay Community Cancer Network (TBCCN) comprised the panel and shared their experiences and suggestions for researchers who work with multicultural and multilingual communities. The panel discussion was followed by a moving and instructive keynote presentation by Dr Susan Matsuko Shinagawa on cancer survivorship and advocacy at the intersection of literacy and culture in the Asian American and Pacific Islander population. The first day ended with a networking poster session with 41 posters presented on a variety of ongoing research in cancer disparities in partnership with communities, complemented by a traveling artwork display of pieces created by cancer survivors.

From the Division of Cancer Prevention & Control Health Outcomes & Behavior Program at the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute, Tampa, Florida.

Address correspondence to Cathy D. Meade, PhD, RN, FAAN, Division of Cancer Prevention & Control Health Outcomes & Behavior Program, H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute, 12902 Magnolia Drive, FOW-EDU, Tampa, FL 33612. E-mail: cdmeade@moffitt.usf.edu

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Days 2 and 3 were led by 45 speaker faculty members from around the country who advanced the conference topics and discussion in 23 plenary and breakout sessions. In these sessions, participants were exposed to methods for evaluation, international health research, CBPR for materials development, training in use of Cancer Control Plan, Link, Act, Network with Evidence-based Tools (PLANET) data, cross-cultural context of survivorship, and strategies to meet cultural and literacy needs of various diverse populations in cancer education outreach and materials. The popular "Lessons from the Field" afternoon session on day 2 provided four practical examples of current research and strategies informed by health equity principles for reaching diverse medically underserved populations. Other important conference activities included a dinner networking reception at the beach and interactive breakfast roundtables. These activities allowed participants to informally share ideas about ongoing research projects, plan future collaborative work, and establish connections that foster collegiality and continue long after the conference is finished.

Day 3, the final day of the conference, continued the themes of CBPR, health equity, cultural competency, and future directions in the field of cancer, culture and literacy as they relate to impacting cancer disparities. Following the interactive breakfast roundtables, Dr June Strickland led a plenary session covering examples, strengths, and challenges of community-based cancer prevention. In the following plenary session, Dr M. Rony François, Florida's Secretary of Health, addressed the importance of culturally competent care to reduce health disparities and promote health equity and social justice.

Finally, conference participants were asked to share the most critical areas of concern about culture and literacy in their work. Participants expressed their main concerns as follows: culture and literacy measurement issues, misuse of culture and important variation in socially constructed racial/ethnic categories, lack of culturally competent health care providers, inadequate health care coverage and limited availability of health information and educational materials that are easy to understand and culturally/linguistically relevant. Conference participants also recommended the development of more cultural competency training for professionals and physicians to address health disparities, and they proposed grassroots education programs that attend to advocacy, patient empowerment, and patient navigation. A final plenary session, *Crosstalk*, led by Dr Cathy Meade, concluded the conference with a summary discussion of future research directions as well as health disparities in the area of cancer, culture and literacy. Conference objectives and intended audience were successfully reached and evaluations indicate a need for future conferences.

Planning and coordination have started for the Sixth Biennial Cancer, Culture and Literacy Conference to be held May 15-17, 2008. Your ideas and suggestions are welcome.