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Path to Kashia: a culturally responsive health initiative for the Hmong community

A healthcare initiative, Path to Kashia, aims to narrow health disparities in vision/eye health of the Hmong in America. The Hmong community, compared to their Asian counterparts, lags in various socioeconomic metrics. Hmong in the US have a median household income of $68,000, compared to $86,000 of all Asian Americans. Only 62.3% have a high school education, compared to 86% of all Asian Americans. Their demographic profile, including social determinants of health such as language barriers, limited health literacy, and cultural differences, suggests the Hmong in America experience a disproportionate burden of poor health. The interplay of these factors emphasizes the critical need for a culturally responsive approach to healthcare initiatives, ensuring that interventions are tailored to the needs of the Hmong population.

Hmong culture is predominantly oral; traditions, history, and skills are passed down from generation to generation orally, mainly by rote learning and storytelling. Although there are advances in improving language barriers with translated reading materials, many Hmong individuals are at risk of limited literacy in their native language and may not be able to read the translated materials. I believe the use of media is an effective and culturally appropriate approach to overcoming health disparities among the Hmong in America. The utilization of visual aids, such as videos, has been explored and shown to be a valuable tool in increasing the Hmong population’s understanding of health topics, including cancer screenings and diabetes.

It is essential to incorporate various cultural leaders and health experts in this process to ensure videos containing evidence-based information are readily accessible and coherent to the Hmong community. Through a peer-review process, translations of medical terminology will be reviewed and passed through a collaboration to guarantee conciseness, understandability, and effectiveness. Creating engaging content through storytelling via short films or interviews is essential, a method consistent with the traditional Hmong way of learning. Finding and interviewing real-life Hmong patients with presumed conditions serves as a compelling and supporting strategy to convey the importance of vision screenings, especially those with existing comorbidities. This is vital because Hmong Americans are reported to have a high prevalence rate for “diagnosed” diabetes and hypertension with a low adherence to care rate.

Future work includes expanding to other health topics and creating culturally appropriate videos. Path to Kashia will be launched as a website with a database of culturally sensitive videos about multiple medical diagnoses/diseases. These videos will be easily accessible to health professionals or community-based organizations for their Hmong community members. With the increasing use of YouTube and Facebook to gain knowledge and connect to the Hmong culture, we will be sharing these videos on various social media platforms.

Although achieving health equity for the Hmong community remains faraway, the path to kashia the Hmong community is within arms reach. I confidently believe this is one major step
in increasing the health perspectives and beliefs of Hmong individuals, starting with optometry.

Footnotes

1. *Kashia* in Hmong translates to ‘understand.’ Path to Kashia is a journey for the Hmong in America to be understood.


