

June 2022 | A periodic e-bulletin to share results of organ donation and transplantation projects funded by the Division of Transplantation.

Promotores de donación: Educating older Hispanics about organ donation through community partnerships

A new e-learning module trains community health workers to discuss organ donation and registration with Hispanic donors.

Hispanic communities in the United States experience unique health needs that affect their ability to get necessary organ transplant surgeries.¹ Funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Division of Transplantation, Professor Heather M. Gardiner and colleagues researched ways to reduce these disparities, focusing on Hispanic women and community health workers. As part of the research, Professor Gardiner and three partnering community organizations developed an e-learning module to educate lay health workers about organ donation and prepare them to hold conversations about organ, eye, and tissue donation with Hispanic community members. In particular, they studied the efficacy of discussing organ donation with Hispanic women aged 50 and over.



A Latina grandmother holds her granddaughter.

Why Focus on Mature Hispanic Women?

Organ donor registration rates are 13% lower among Hispanic people than non-Hispanic Whites.² Additionally, families of Hispanic ethnicity are 3 times more likely to

refuse donation.³ Hispanics resistant to organ donation cite religious beliefs, misgivings about healthcare institutions, and fear of discussing death or after-death planning as the cause of their resistance.^{4, 5, 6}

Furthermore, the National Survey of Organ Donation Attitudes and Practices reports that older age is linked to lower donor registration and deceased donation rates.⁴ As a result, adults who exist at the intersection of Hispanic ethnicity and older age are some of the people least likely to register as donors.

Because Hispanic communities are more likely to rely on female family members to make health-related decisions,⁷ Professor Gardiner hypothesized that educational conversations with women aged 50 and over would be a culturally sensitive and effective approach for raising awareness about the importance of organ donor sign-ups among older Hispanic adults.

Strategic Intervention Through Community Partners



A mature Latina smiling.

In low-income Hispanic neighborhoods, community health workers (*promotores de salud*) are typically the first point of contact for health information. Over 80% of these *promotores* are women, referred to as *promotoras*.^{8, 9} Since these *promotores* are already trusted community health resources, Professor Gardiner proposed leveraging their pre-existing relationships to educate the Hispanic community about organ donation.

Professor Gardiner and her team worked with The Gift of Life Institute in Philadelphia to develop a web-based

learning module that educates *promotores* about organ donation and trains them in communication skills for small-group conversations (*pláticas*) about organ donation and registration with Hispanic women aged 50 and over (mature Latinas).

“*Promotores* were taught how to use open-ended questions, assess baseline knowledge, probe for additional information, and persuade without being coercive. They were also taught how to highlight the need for organ donors and explain three ways to sign up,” said Professor Gardiner.

After *promotores* viewed the hour-long module, they were asked to apply what they learned to two *pláticas* with mature Latinas in their community. Survey results showed that the module increased *promotores*’ sense of preparation and confidence leading *pláticas* about organ donation. Moreover, approximately 68% of mature Latinas (254 out of 375) who attended a *promotora*-led *plática*, expressed greater comfort with organ donation and a greater willingness to register as deceased organ donors. Professor

Gardiner plans to further refine the training module, and hopes to make it a publicly available resource.



Strategies that work:

- **Focus on the gift of life.** For cultures sensitive to discussion about death, frame organ donation conversations around life.
- **Listen with an open heart.** Show care for community perspectives by asking thoughtful questions and developing strategic, culturally sensitive campaigns.
- **Leverage existing relationships.** Involve community health workers in organ donor registration and donation outreach and education.

The Promotores Perspective

In addition to interviewing Professor Gardiner, HRSA also spoke with her community partner Amanda Benitez, Director of Community Health at Enlace Chicago, and Ms. Benitez's colleague, *promotora* Ilda Hernández. Ms. Benitez and Ms. Hernández both said that involving *promotores* in organ donation education was a highly effective strategy. They encouraged organ donation organizations to use existing community health infrastructure like *promotores* when trying to engage communities who may have some distrust of the medical establishment.

Like Professor Gardiner, Ms. Hernández stressed the need for more education and visibility around organ donation as a life-saving gift in Hispanic communities.

"We need Spanish-language television commercials, news stories, posters, and magazine ads to inform people. People in our community are sometimes scared of organ donation, even though they need it, because they haven't been educated. We need to portray organ donation as an act of compassion that lets someone live on through others," said Ms. Hernández.

Ms. Hernández shared one mature Latina's story to illustrate her point. The woman's son was a registered organ donor, and it was not until his death that she learned he could save up to 8 lives by donating his organs. It was the realization that her son could live on through other people that led the mother and surviving family members to sign up as organ donors. For Ms. Hernández, this story shows what is possible when *promotores* and other Hispanic community members understand organ donation and teach their communities about the gift of life.

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