

PRELIMINARY REPORT: COMMUNITY HEALTH NEEDS
ASSESSMENT:

*Assessing the river communities of Palmyra, Riverside, Delran, Willingboro,
Beverly, and Burlington City*

Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center:
Center for Public Health

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August 15, 2008

Abstract:

In an effort to improve the health outcomes of the communities it serves, the Lourdes Center for Public Health initiated a community health needs assessment of Burlington County. Our aim is to collect primary data in the form of surveys to determine the overall health needs of the community. As this will be a comprehensive assessment of a very diverse population, we expect that the project will require several sets of surveys in order to effectively correlate demographics with potential barriers to health care. The objective for the first set of general surveys is to determine the health status of the communities as well as to focus on the socioeconomic factors that might play a role in their access to health care.

We have conducted both written and oral surveys on identified vulnerable communities that Lourdes serves. Our defined populations include the river communities of Burlington County, specifically the townships of Palmyra (08065), Riverside (08075), Delran (08075), Willingboro (08046), Beverly (08010)*, Burlington City* (08016), and Florence* (08518). Our preliminary data shows that there is a significant need for dental care

* These additional townships were included in our target population under the direction of the Public Health Officer of the Burlington County Health Department.

Methodology of Data Collection:

We initially created a two-page survey to gain a sense of the general demographics of our target population. This first set of surveys was distributed at Riverline train stations. While this method gained some responses, it did not seem to be an effective way for distributing the surveys because most people were in a rush and not all members of the population use the Riverline. Thus, we looked for different opportunities to distribute surveys and created a more comprehensive survey including socioeconomic factors that might pose a barrier to proper access to healthcare. Our aim was to be able to correlate potential health care issues such as nutrition, education, transportation, and dental care to basic demographic data. Questions were drawn from a variety of sources, such as public health articles from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Pew Foundation, as well as the Burlington County Annual Health Report 2006.

With practicality in mind, we focused our efforts toward distributing surveys in stationary locations where people might expect lengthy waiting periods (e.g. clinics, beauty parlors, barbershops). Having established a relationship with the Public Health Officer of the Burlington County Health Department, we were able to connect to the state-sponsored Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) clinics. The clinics travel to different sites throughout our target communities meeting once or twice a month to provide health services to qualified mothers. Based on our connection with these clinics, we were able to collaborate with local churches as well as various community organizations, which are described below:

WIC Clinics (*sites located in Riverside, Palmyra, Burlington City, Willingboro, and Beverly*):

A large majority of our preliminary data was obtained from the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Clinics, a state-sponsored program that provides medical care, food vouchers as well as nutrition education programs for low-income mothers. It was first necessary to submit a written request to the public health officer to inform staff members of our presence in the WIC clinics as well as to gain approval from the WIC clinic director. When possible, surveys were conducted in the form of interviews in efforts to establish personal connections with the community members. While this may have been slightly more time-consuming, it helped us to gain a better sense of the perspectives of different community members as well as to reinforce the goal of our survey by reaching out and listening to the voices of a more vulnerable subset of the target areas. However, in busier clinic settings, many surveys were filled out personally by the clients. Language barriers were a challenge in the Riverside site as the clients spoke mainly Spanish or Portuguese. Most of the surveys conducted from this site were orally translated and transcribed to be able to communicate with clients. With this particular set of surveys, the accuracy of answers should be regarded with some level of discretion, as translations were a significant challenge. While distributing surveys at the WIC clinics was an effective mode of reaching out to a more vulnerable population, the majority of the sampling population was comprised of females. Thus, the gender representation of sample should be taken into consideration.

Central Baptist Church of Palmyra

As an established site for the local WIC clinic in Palmyra, the pastor was very receptive to the idea of students attending the Sunday service to reach out to community members. By building a bond of trust with the pastor and members of the church, most members of the congregation were very receptive to our survey and welcomed our presence. Most surveys were completed personally by members of the church in an effort to increase our survey output in a limited time setting.

Epworth United Methodist Church of Palmyra

The pastor of this church preferred that we leave surveys with him to give the surveys credibility. While we did not have the opportunity to speak with many members of the church personally, we gained valuable insight into the Palmyra community by speaking with the church secretary. She actively sought out social support services and other resources for church members. She expressed the need for more social support services in the community.

Beverly Housing Authority

Also affiliated with the Women, Infants, and Children's Program, the Beverly Housing Authority is a public housing program that provides safe and affordable housing for eligible low-income families, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. Seeing that we

were working with the WIC clinics, the receptionist was very willing to distribute surveys in the mailboxes of more than 70 residents. While we have only received 7 surveys back, we expect to collect more surveys in subsequent visits.

Beauty Shops and Barber Shops Visited:

- Celebrity Hair Salons
- Good Looking Barber Shop
- Busy Bee Beauty Parlor
- Florence Pharmacy
- Family Fun Fitness

Data Analysis:

After analyzing the data from the 85 surveys we collected, we have several important preliminary findings. Primarily, about 74% of survey respondents were women. This is most likely due to the fact that our primary location of distribution were WIC Clinics. Future projects may want to explore other gender diverse locations. The data also reported that 35% of the respondents were unemployed. This may be because we distributed mainly during the week and during the day so respondents were more likely to be unemployed than the general population. In addition, mothers of young children who filled out the surveys at the WIC Clinics are more likely to be unemployed as well due to the need for childcare. Another significant finding was that about 18% of participants reported not having health insurance and about 45% of those who reported having health insurance received assistance from Medicare or Medicaid. The data also reported that 34.1% of respondents had difficulty paying medical bills within the last year and that 15.9% of participants or their family members had gone without necessary medical care. The latter may be due to inability to pay for care, lack of insurance, or lack of regular care provider.

While we originally thought that transportation was a major barrier to receiving healthcare, 76% of participants reported that transportation to medical care was not a problem. Additionally, although we realize that this data is based on personal perception, we found that 68% of respondents wanted to lose weight which may indicate a need for nutrition and exercise initiatives within the community. However, we also found that people perceived cost of food to be a major barrier to a healthy diet and 42.6% of respondents found cost to be a major barrier to buying fresh food.

Moving onto the issue of dental hygiene, about 19% of respondents found access to oral care to be a major problem. Findings revealed that almost 52% of participants do not have a family dentist. In addition, 24.6% of respondents had not been to the dentist in two years and 59% go to the dentist less than the ADA recommended amount of every 6 months. About 39% of participants cited cost as the reason for not visiting the dentist and 64% of respondents would be interested in attending a dental clinic sponsored by Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center in Burlington County. Please see the Appendix for tables and graphs of the data, as well as a copy of the survey.

Reflections from the Community:

In addition to the numerical data collected from the survey responses, we felt that the conversations we had with the people of the community were also extremely valuable and worthwhile pieces of data. While out in the field or speaking with members of the community, we ran into several people who were eager to give us their opinions and educate us about their respective towns. These people were very passionate about their towns and had many ideas and thoughts about how the public health department could improve the area. Talking to members of the community gave people a chance to voice concerns that they might not be able to express on an objective survey. We felt that their ideas were valuable pieces of information for the Community Needs Assessment therefore we have included excerpts from these conversations below.

❖ Phone Conversation with Veronica Stevenson, secretary from Riverside United Methodist Church

She expressed her concerns about the high level of lead contamination in the waters in Riverside. Moreover, she is very upset by the lack of communication between the Burlington County Health Department and people of the community. She has been involved in the committee for Citizens Getting Together for Environmental Concerns and sees very little effort on the part of the Burlington County Health Department in addressing what she feels is “*the* most pressing issue for the Riverside community: the issue of water contamination”. She personally knows many residents of Riverside who have been diagnosed with MS and Parkinson’s disease. She feels very strongly that this is linked with the high levels of mercury in their waters and would like to see hospitals working together with the county health department to take action on this important issue.

❖ Conversation with Peter from Beverly

As a resident of Beverly for over 10 years, he has seen the development of the town and seems to be satisfied with the improvement he has seen in the community. He explained to us that the issue of drugs had been a major concern for residents in the past and that it used to be considered a very dangerous area. However, in recent years he has seen a huge improvement in neighborhood safety. He was also a very religious man and went on at length about the role it plays on his everyday life.

❖ Conversation with Secretary at Epworth United Methodist Church in Palmyra

She has been involved in reaching out to the community for many years and sees a huge need for social services support in the hospitals. She knows many church members who have lost their jobs and just do not know where to go to get the type of help that they need. She knows plenty of people who qualify for Medicaid but just don’t know how to apply or are even aware that they can apply for state-sponsored health insurance. She feels very strongly that the county health department overlooks townships such as Palmyra because of the presence of wealthier townships such as Moorestown and Medford. She believes that churches play a huge role in dealing with the everyday needs of the community.

❖ **Conversation with long-time residents at the Spanish Language Learning School in Beverly**

One woman who had lived in Beverly for over twenty years spoke to us for a while to give us her thoughts on the town and the people of the town. She described that the town had improved in recent years and had become a less dangerous place to live with many good people. She pointed out that the town appears to be fairly empty. In her opinion, this is because there are not many businesses in town because the people of the town are too poor to support the local establishments. They do not even have a grocery store in the town. In addition, the Riverline does not go through the center of town so people are not encouraged to get off and walk through the city as in other towns such as Palmyra, which has many thriving local businesses and public transportation which goes through the center of town. She also pointed at that one does not see many FOR SALE signs when walking through the town because many people have lived in the town for many years and own their property. She seemed to be encouraged because she thinks many people believe that the town will become more prosperous in the future because of its location along the river. However, she feels that a more convenient public transportation line must be made available in order for the town to become more prosperous. Additionally, she told us that there are very few local sports clubs or recreational activities that are offered to children in Beverly. In addition, parents do not want to take time out of their day to bring their children to activities.

Future Contacts for Data Collection:

- Beverly Housing Authority
- **Dr. Deepti Das**, coordinator of WIC Clinics
- **Jennifer Horner**, Public Health Epidemiologist at BC Health Dept
- **Robert Gogats**, Public Health Officer at BC Health Dept
- **Pastor Wess Allan**, Central Baptist Church of Palmyra
- **Pastor Reverend Doh** (Epworth United Methodist Church, Palmyra)
- **Pastor Blanchett**, Good Sheppard Church (merge between St. Peters in Riverside & St. Joseph's in Beverly)
- **Reva Foster**, Director of Willingboro Community Center – also heads Senior Services Department at WCC
- **Cindy Bowers**, Administrator at Senior Care of Delran
- **Alice Markey**, Manager of Community Health Improvement, OLLMC
- **Connie Giampaolo**, Director of Spiritual Care, OLLMC

Future Directions:

We have found that our connection with the Burlington County Health Department has opened many doors to community organizations. Thus, we suggest working together with the township governments to gain an established presence in the community. Although we have received somewhat of a limited response from township administrators, continuing our efforts in gaining relationships with municipal governments will prove to be a huge asset to our project.

Comment [w1]: How??

Furthermore, we hope to generate a second set of surveys that focus specifically on the healthcare issues of the community. Of increasing importance are the issues of mental health, substance abuse, and vision care. After attending a Community Health Awareness Group (CHAG) meeting at the Burlington County Health Department, we see an even greater emphasis on addressing the issue of mental health, which has been stated as the number one public health concern in Burlington County. While the health department has partnered with both public and private organizations to offer programs serving the mental health needs of the county, finding permanent housing for clients is currently the most pressing issue for these organizations. While these programs do their best to offer the highest quality and most comprehensive services, their resources can only be stretched so far. High rates of overcrowding and the subsequent need for more facilities suggest that mental health and the social issues surrounding this topic are steadily increasing in importance to communities throughout Burlington County. Program directors mentioned that one cause of the overcrowding in their facilities is the misuse of their services by the homeless, who do not suffer from mental illness, but have no other options for support or housing. Also patients with several diagnoses are difficult to accommodate in one program, therefore these cases tend to drain resources.

Thus as a next step in the community health needs assessment of Burlington county, we recommend a set of surveys that would serve the dual purpose of assessing the severity of the need for different mental health services and of informing community members about specific programs that are available to them. To accomplish this goal, it will be necessary to meet with and gain the advice and express approval of the administrator of the Department of Human Services at the Burlington County Health Department and to research locations and methods for distributing surveys.

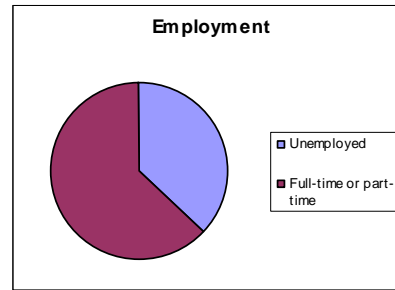
In addition, Professor Ray Lum from Drexel University's School of Public Health suggested that we develop an additional aspect to our Needs Assessment which involves tape recording or video recording the thoughts and opinions of community members. He called this idea "photo voice" and suggested that we give cameras to people from target communities and allow them to take pictures of their daily life and then discuss the pictures with members of the Public Health Center. After speaking with members of the community and realizing how much we could learn from talking with them, as discussed in the Reflections portion of the report, we thought that adding a "photo voice" or similar aspect to our project might be beneficial. Further analysis is required to determine the feasibility of such a project, especially when keeping in mind financial considerations.

While our findings in the Community Health Needs Assessment of Burlington County are still preliminary, we have found that residents are eager to share their thoughts and feelings about health in their communities. They were excited about the public health center's interest in their health and the prospect for improvement. It is our hope that future projects will follow up on this enthusiasm and our initial findings to dig deeper into the specific issues that are affecting Burlington County residents. Specific surveys that focus on issues of dental hygiene and social services may help to identify ways that the Lourdes Center for Public Health can work to improve the health of members of its community. Through the synergy of our foundation and future projects, we hope that

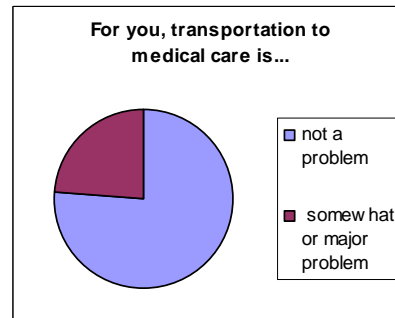
policies and programs can be adopted that will be beneficial to the health of the people of Burlington County.

Appendix:**EMPLOYMENT**

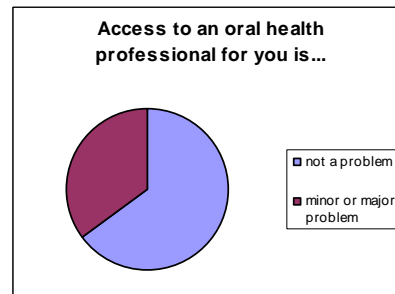
	Unemployed	Full-time or part-time	
TOTAL	28	47	75
Percentage Unemployed:		0.373333333	37.33333

**TRANSPORTATION**

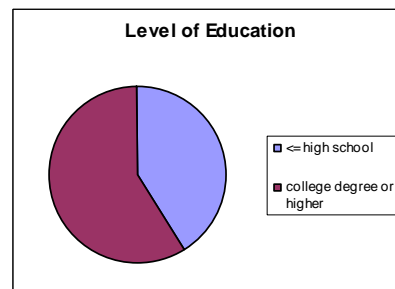
	not a problem	somewhat or major problem	
TOTAL	64	20	84
Percentage experience transportation barrier:		0.238095238	23.80952

**ACCESS TO DENTAL CARE**

	not a problem	minor or major problem	
TOTAL	44	24	68
Percent experience barrier to dental care:		0.352941176	35.29412

**EDUCATION**

	<= high school	college degree or higher	
TOTAL	35	50	85
Percent <= high school:		0.411764706	41.17647



NUTRITION- economic barrier to fresh food

	not at all	at least somewhat of a barrier	
TOTAL	22	49	71
Percent experience economic barrier to fresh food:		0.690140845	69.01408



INTEREST IN LOURDES DENTAL CLINIC

	Yes	No	
TOTAL	45	25	70
Percent interested in dental clinic:		0.642857143	64.28571

