Hepatitis B awareness and screening campaign with the Vietnamese on the Mississippi gulf coast

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Introduction
Hepatitis B is a blood-borne communicable disease that affects the liver. It is spread through sharing personal items of an infected person; transmission from infected mother to unborn child; and sexual contact with an infected person. Estimates show that one in ten Asians and Pacific Islanders are living with chronic hepatitis B. CDC recommends routine testing in the Vietnamese population on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Screening for hepatitis B is inexpensive and the benefits include limiting disease progression and facilitating early access to treatments that can save significant life years.

Objective/Purpose
The purpose is to increase awareness of hepatitis B in the Vietnamese population on the Mississippi Gulf Coast and to determine its prevalence in this population.

Methods
Initially, Vietnamese community partnerships were established and language barriers were addressed as the hepatitis B education campaign was developed and executed. In-language seminars and translated print materials were used to heighten awareness regarding the importance of knowing one’s hepatitis status. Subsequently, hepatitis B screenings were conducted by Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) staff during a series of community activities from March 2012-May 2013, and results counseling and referrals were provided approximately two weeks thereafter.

World Hepatitis Day 2012

Results
The MSDH screened a total of 409 Vietnamese for hepatitis B from March 2012-May 2013. Each screening event revealed a chronic hepatitis B prevalence between (10-15%), corroborating the national estimates.

Discussion
The MSDH’s coordinated efforts to provide timely and culturally appropriate hepatitis B education for the Mississippi Gulf Coast Vietnamese population resulted in significant community interest and desire for screenings, yielding important data for addressing hepatitis B immunization and treatment needs in this specific Vietnamese community. Referral sources were available for participants who needed immunizations and those who tested positive for hepatitis B; however, due to high uninsured rates among this population, treatment was rarely received. One challenge identified in working with this Vietnamese community, was that although referrals were made, once a person was identified as needing treatment, they lacked the adequate resources to obtain the treatment. Moving forward, it is imperative for health care professionals to work together; creating a system that links those identified with hepatitis B and those without health insurance, to the necessary resources.

Working With Partners
Asian Americans for Change
Boat People SOS, Inc.
Coastline Medical Center, PLLC
Christ the King Catholic Church-Ocean Springs, MS
Digestive Health Center
Gilead Sciences
Hijra House Association
Mississippi Coalition for Vietnamese American Fisher Folk and Families
Mississippi State Department of Health-Public Health District IX
Mississippi State Department of Health-Public Health Lab
NOELA Community Health Center
Vertex Pharmaceuticals
Vietnamese Martyrs Catholic Church
WLOX TV Station-Mississippi Gulf Coast

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