

Mobilizing Asian Americans: Understanding the San Francisco Hep B Free Movement

Grace J. Yoo - December 2010

Introduction

Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Americans represent 34% of San Francisco, yet because of various factors, they experience a disproportionate burden of liver cancer and undetected HBV infection and thus they experience the highest risk of Hepatitis B of any racialized group in the city.

Recognizing that multiple factors are involved in addressing this complex of health issues, starting in 2007, the San Francisco Hep B Free Campaign drew together a comprehensive coalition of key leaders and organizations from media, health care, government, community and business sectors within and beyond the Asian American community. With the support of these partners, the San Francisco Hep B Free Campaign has been able to provide free and low-cost Hepatitis B testing and vaccinations to Asian American adults at locations throughout San Francisco.

The key priorities of the SF Hep B Free campaign are 1) to create public and healthcare provider awareness about the importance of testing & vaccinating APIs for Hepatitis B, 2) to promote routine hepatitis B testing and vaccination within the primary care medical community, and, 3) to ensure access to treatment for chronically infected individuals. A key element of the San Francisco Hep B Free campaign has been the development of resources and creating and implementing a comprehensive media campaign directed at Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Americans in the city and county of San Francisco. The overall goal of this evaluation is to identify the best practices of the San Francisco Hep B Free campaign in relation to organizing and mobilizing the Asian American community. While the San Francisco Hep B Free campaign is multifaceted, targeting a variety of groups including Asian Americans, the general population, hospital groups, and policy makers, this evaluation focuses on the impact of the campaign on Asian Americans.

This campaign started with three founding partners, including the AsianWeek Foundation, a community based non-profit that celebrates the diversity of Asian Pacific America through identity assemblage by bringing together the multiplicity of groups and personality that make up the Asian American community. The other founding partner has been the San Francisco Department of Public Health, whose mission is to protect and promote the health of all San Franciscans. Within the

Department of Public Health, the Communicable Disease Prevention Unit has taken the lead in promoting Hepatitis B awareness and prevention strategies, including developing vaccination and testing sites throughout San Francisco. The third founding partner has been the Asian Liver Center at Stanford University, a non-profit organization focused on addressing the high incidence of Hepatitis B and liver cancer in Asians and Asian Americans. Founded in 1996, the Asian Liver Center spearheads educational outreach and advocacy efforts in the areas of Hepatitis B and liver cancer prevention and treatment, serves as a resource for both the general public and health practitioners, and implements clinical and research programs.

Methods

In order to document and assess how the Asian American community in the San Francisco coalesced, developed and implemented the San Francisco Hep B Free Campaign, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 23 key informants who represent Asian American partner organizations and political and community leaders in San Francisco that have participated in this campaign. This group included physicians Dr. Stuart Fong, of Chinese Hospital; Dr. Lisa Tang, of Kaiser; and Dr. Ed Chow, of Chinese Community Health Plan; student Jason Liu; elected officials California State Assemblymember, Fiona Ma; San Francisco Board of Supervisors President, David Chiu; Congressperson Mike Honda; and Francis Tsang representing San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom; Asian American community leaders Darryl Chiang of the Asian American Theater Company; Ron Lee of Cathay Post; Peter Swing of Asian Law Caucus; Tamiko Wong of Asian Week Foundation; Caryl Ito; Rose Chung; Ching Wong of Vietnamese Health Promotion Project; Sandy Mori of Kimochi; Asian American community members Mary Jung; Jeanette Tam; Celia Wang and media/corporate leaders Alan Wang; Vicky Wong of DAE Advertising; Grace Niwa; and Jordan Liu of Bristol-Meyers, Pharm.

These twenty-three (n=23) key individuals were involved in community outreach through Asian American organizations that have partnered with and participated in the San Francisco Hep B Free campaign. A non-random, purposive sample was used. The basis for selecting an Asian American community organization representative or activist-leader to be interviewed was related to the

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influence they had had in the San Francisco Hep B Free Campaign. Those interviewed included community members and also health care providers, media and political leaders, and leaders of community organizations serving the Asian American community (See Table 1).

During these in-depth interviews, we asked questions about how they had gotten involved in the campaign, what resources they brought to the campaign, gaps and challenges in the campaign, messages that have resonated with Asian Americans and their thoughts on the effectiveness of specific aspects and best practices of the campaign.

Table 1. Background of Key Informants from the Asian American Community

N=23

Type of Key Informant	% (N)
Health Care Providers	3
Political Leaders	4
Media	2
Students	1
Community Service Providers & Advocates	8
Corporate	2
Community Members	3

All of the interviews were taped-recorded and then fully transcribed. In the first iteration of qualitative analysis, the data was coded using grounded theory analytical methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to identify themes, trends, and patterns about the successes and challenges of this health campaign. Several themes occur repeatedly across the interviews and in field notes.

Results

According to these 23 key informants, this campaign proved to be successful for various reasons. In identifying key themes in this campaign, three different components emerged

through these interviews. The three components of the campaign that proved to be successful and should be replicable include 1) crafting the message, 2) delivering the message and 3) sustaining the message and movement. Within these three components are a variety of ways that these goals have been accomplished, for example, the involvement of high profile and highly engaged members of the communities has been very important for the success of the campaign.

Messages that have resonated with the San Francisco Asian American Community

Normalizing Hep B

According to key informants, the evolution in the health campaigns' messaging has had a cumulative impact on the Asian American community. In fact, just talking about the illness has helped decrease the stigma around Hepatitis B. The stigma associated with Hepatitis B in Asian American communities can be traced to the attitudes towards Hep B in Asia. These attitudes, as they are perceived by Asian Americans, include stigmatization of those living with Hepatitis B, resulting in social exile. According to key informants, this stigmatization is due to a cultural tendency to not talk about bad news, Hep B being seen as "infectious," and Hep B being associated with "bad behavior." Consequently, Asian Americans may learn to be silent about Hep B. According to key informants, these ideas of stigmatization can impact how people view Hepatitis B and those who are chronically infected with Hepatitis B. Many of the respondents have mentioned that discussing the disease has been the first step in de-stigmatizing those infected with it, but many have also noted that this has not been an easy process.

The most difficult part of the campaign was finding a way to encourage people to talk about Hepatitis B, to normalize the discussions around it, and to compel the community to do something about it. An essential and effective component of the campaign has been the ability to significantly reframe the discourse around Hepatitis B. In many Asian countries, Hepatitis B is stigmatized. People who have the disease are taught to be ashamed, and consequently, it may not be talked about openly. The first major advertising campaign of Hep B Free featured the slogan "B a Hero," emphasizing that ordinary members of the Asian American community could be heroes if they got

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tested and encouraged others to do so as well. This campaign, while somewhat effective, did not result in a dramatic increase in the numbers of those being tested.

Hep B Can Be Prevented

According to key informants, the fact that Hep B can be prevented is significant because this means it can be seen as different from cancer, which many in the Asian American community associate with a death sentence. Focusing on the message that this is a problem that can be solved can encourage greater involvement by members of the community.

Emphasizing that Hep B can be prevented, as well as de-stigmatizing those infected with it have been key components of messages of the various ad campaigns. The message that Asian Americans have a high incidence of Hepatitis B, and are not getting vaccinated, has had a significant impact on those who became active participants in this campaign. Several respondents suggested that one of the best practices of this campaign is the focus on solutions such as increasing testing and vaccination.

Delivering the Message

Best practices of this campaign were found with the delivery of the message of the San Francisco Hep B Free Campaign. The campaign creatively and effectively used media including ethnic presses and social media. They also utilized high profile spokespersons, community people and educated health professionals to be leaders and “heroes” of this campaign. The delivery of the message was managed through community-based, grassroots-style efforts such as outreach at every major Asian American festival and street fair in San Francisco delivering the message of the importance of screening, testing and vaccination. At some of these events, screenings were also available on the spot for interested people to access.

Moreover, 1.5 and 2nd generation Asian American have served as an entry point to reach relatives, communities and generations in various communities that were hard to reach. A major effort of this campaign has been the ability de-stigmatize this illness, but advocates and activists have realized that there is continual work to be done. There remains a need to continue to de-stigmatize Hep B as the first step in education to facilitate

better outreach. Although barriers continue to exist in de-stigmatizing Hepatitis B among Asian immigrants, many of the respondents have suggested that the campaign has been successful in their outreach to American-born and the 1.5 generation.

Leadership, Personal Connections, and Partnerships: Sustaining a Movement

In the United States, this groundbreaking Asian American health coalition is unique and the first of its kind. The ability to have widespread awareness, key partnerships, and overall success has been due to the people working in coalition to sustain this movement. Interviews with these key informants identified three key factors that explain why this movement has been successfully sustained: personal connections/ties, trusted leadership, and a partnership between the San Francisco Department of Public Health and other high profile organizations.

Personal Ties

A key to the success of this campaign has been the ability of the messaging to make Hepatitis B familiar and personal. In fact, many that have involved themselves in the San Francisco Hep B Free Campaign have been personally affected by Hepatitis B and/or liver cancer. This personal connection was very important for people becoming actively involved in the Hep B Free Campaign. Several respondents discussed how they got involved because they themselves, a family member, or a good friend were diagnosed with Hepatitis B; their involvement may also have been influenced by the involvement of community leaders.

Trusted Leadership

Key informants have mentioned how important it has been to keep the message about Hep B alive through partnerships with departments of public health, health care providers, the corporate world and community organizations. The San Francisco Hep B Free Campaign has successfully partnered with multiple different entities throughout San Francisco. The strength of these connections and partnerships has been largely due to Ted Fang's leadership. Through his family's long-standing ties with the Asian American community, including the

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founding of the first Asian American news weekly, Ted Fang was a key factor in the success of this campaign.

Partnership with the Department of Public Health

Respondents often mentioned Janet Zola of the San Francisco Department of Public Health being a key partner in sustaining and making these efforts successful. Many note that gaining the partnership with Janet Zola and the local department of public health has been extremely important in providing credibility and legitimacy as well as needed resources. In addition to the partnerships between the Department of Public Health and Asian American organizations, a strength of the campaign was the partnership with churches, hospitals, clinics, employee organizations, schools, corporate entities, the media, and even sports organizations.

Partnerships with Business, Media and Political Leaders

The majority of key informants suggested that political and financial power was key to shaping this movement, and that if there were lessons to be learned, it is that a campaign like this needs heart and inspiration, but that also needs to tap into and enhance existing relationships between individuals in the business, political and media communities.

Gaps and Challenges to the SFHBF Campaign

Although the San Francisco Hep B campaign has been successful with its engaging message and its massive levels of education and outreach, and it has also been successful in screening, testing and vaccination, there have also been some gaps and challenges within the campaign. These have included the need for continued education and outreach to populations especially seniors and first generation immigrants.

Recommendations: Best Practices of the San Francisco Hep B Free Campaign

These 23 key informants identified three major components that were key factors to success in this movement including 1) messages that resonated with Asian Americans and Hepatitis B, 2)

delivery of this message, and 3) sustaining this movement through partnership with the local department of public health.

Key Informants also mentioned that the best practice of the SFHBF campaign has been its efforts to de-stigmatize Hep B in the Asian American community. Key informants have suggested that if others across the country sought to replicate SFHBF should identify the messages that resonate with Asian Americans and Hepatitis B and also identify innovative ways of delivering the message.

According to key informants, similar attempts to initiate and sustain such a movement, should also incorporate the following components:

- Trusted leadership
- Personal connections to the movement
- Partnership with local departments of public health
- Partnership with corporate, political and media leaders

About the Author

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