

Crossing the Religious Divide: training caregivers in religious diversity

Through funding from the National Network of Libraries of Medicine, the Creighton University Health Sciences Library has partnered with Project Interfaith and the Respite Resource Center to promote awareness of religious diversity and its effect on healthcare and to provide access to resources needed by healthcare workers. Using a workshop format, Project Interfaith conducted training on religious diversity and how it can affect the way caregivers provide care. Through two day-long training seminars participants were able to reflect on their own religious views and learn about the religious views and beliefs of others in our diverse community. They learned about accommodating the beliefs of others under the law, and about communicating in a sensitive manner. Participants also received information about how to access reliable health information and develop best practices they can use in the community.

The population of the United States continues to diversify religiously and religion is central to how many individuals understand themselves, their role in the world, and concepts of health, death, and dying. Feedback from professional care givers working in long-term facilities, hospitals and in-home care agencies reveal that issues of religion and religious diversity often are inadequately addressed or are completely neglected in the broad cultural competency training many professional care givers and health care professionals receive. Professional care givers need to be equipped with the **knowledge and skills to effectively work with and serve religiously-diverse populations.**

The training sessions, held November 6, 2008 and May 6, 2009, were attended by over 75 participants that included health care service providers, public health workers, social workers, and members of the general public. These participants spanned over a dozen different religious affiliations. The funding allowed for this training to be provided at a greatly reduced cost to the participants and some received full scholarships. Participants were able to get five continuing education credits for attending.

The program included presentations, exercises and discussions on identity and religion, developing a common language for discussing religious diversity issues, accommodating clients' religious needs and practices under the law, an overview of basic beliefs and religious demographics of the major religious communities, a discussion on best practices, and how to find reliable health information resources.

Funding provided two laptop computers for use in the office of Project Interfaith. A website is being created that will provide participants with links to valuable health information resources as well as religious diversity information. Creighton University Health Sciences Library will continue to work with Project Interfaith in keeping the health information resources current and available. Library staff will also be available to present at future workshops.

Thanks to this funding, we were able to provide valuable training to health care providers and others in the area of religious and cultural diversity. We encourage other academic institutions to partner with community organizations and to take advantage of funding opportunities provided by the National Network of Libraries of Medicine.