Bradley/Hasbro Center Launches Asthma Study for Latino Students

PROVIDENCE – DAPHNE KOinis-Mitchell, PhD, a researcher and staff psychologist at the Bradley Hasbro Children’s Research Center, and director of the Community Asthma Program at Hasbro Children’s Hospital, has launched a new asthma intervention program for Latino middle school students in urban public schools to study how best to help them manage their asthma. The Rhode Island Puerto Rico ASMAS Program (Asthma Management in Schools) team will develop and test a peer-facilitated asthma self-management intervention for Latino children in the 7th and 8th grades.

“Asthma health disparities continue to exist in children, with Latino children of Puerto Rican and Dominican descent having the highest rate of complications from asthma,” said Koinis-Mitchell. “Middle school children suffer from asthma more than children from any other age group. This same group spends a majority of their day in school, and when faced with symptoms, must manage their illness in school. So, it is vitally important to reach these children where their health and academic success are affected on a daily basis and teach them to self-manage their asthma.”

The ASMAS program will create and evaluate a culturally tailored asthma self-management program for Latino middle school students through a partnership with high schools in the Central Falls and Pawtucket school districts. Latino high school students (juniors and seniors) who have asthma will be selected to administer the intervention to their younger middle school peers from the same school districts. The high school students, who are nominated by school personnel, will use their participation in this program as an independent study and as a community service requirement fulfillment.

Although guidelines for managing asthma in the school setting currently exist, translating these guidelines into the context of urban schools raises many challenges.

“During the middle school years, older peers have a major influence on children’s health behaviors. However, traditional formats of health education delivery don’t capitalize on this influence,” said Koinis-Mitchell. “We hope this new peer-based intervention can help us overcome the traditional challenges for health education in this group, such as language barriers and limited school supports for children who have asthma.”

Koinis-Mitchell hopes the study will result in improved asthma self-management among study participants, such as managing symptoms better, as well as keeping a rescue inhaler on hand and having an action plan with a school nurse.

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