University of Puerto Rico - Medical Sciences

Program Name: University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus (UPR-MSC)
Grant Type: Hispanic Serving Institution
Grant Status: Alumni
Year Awarded: 2011
State: Puerto Rico

Abrazo a la Vida (Embracing Life) is a suicide prevention collaborative program of the University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus (UPR-MSC) Women’s Health Center with the Department of Psychiatry of the Campus School of Medicine, the student services of its six Schools, the Deanship of Student Affairs and other programs on campus; as well as with the Puerto Rico Foundation for Suicide Prevention and Research, and the Program for Crisis Intervention of the Puerto Rico Administration of Mental Health and Addiction Services (Puerto Rico Department of Health).

The long-term goal is to develop a collaborative suicide prevention education infrastructure within the campus using a multi-faceted approach including suicide prevention seminars, development of a student peer counseling program, and the development of a cross-campus Advisory Board on suicide prevention. Educational seminars will be culturally appropriate and focused on multiple campus stakeholders including students; faculty; psychiatric, counseling, and clinical staff; and auxiliary personnel such as security and maintenance.

The selected audience for this project is students enrolled in the six schools at the UPR-MSC, the health sciences academic campus of the University of Puerto Rico system. The 2010-2011 enrollment is 2,402 with the majority being female. The student population is aged from 18 to over 35 years of age, dominantly Hispanic, and has significant financial support such as subsidized student loans. Data from the 2010 National Alcohol Drug and Violence Survey (NADVS), administered on campus in alternate years, indicates 11.5% of responding females, and 7.2% of responding males had experienced suicidal behavior in the previous 12 months. Two of participating females indicated they had attempted suicide during this same time period. A majority of female respondents (55.8%) and 37.1% of males reported having experienced profound sadness and/or depression in the previous 12 months. Of those students reporting not drinking or using illegal drugs, 8% reported thinking about suicide while 9.1% of those reporting drinking or using illegal drugs think about suicide three or more times a week.

Through the educational seminars alone, we estimate that 1,620 members of the campus community will be served over the life of this funding period. Of these 55% will be members of the general student population, 16% of faculty, and 13% of auxiliary personnel. In addition, the program will support the development of a student peer-to-peer counseling program which will train 180 students in this process over the funding period. Annually, we anticipate serving 300 students, 72 auxiliary personnel, and 60 faculty members via educational seminars. Each year, 60 students will choose to participate in the student peer-to-peer counseling program. Additionally, we will constitute a campus-wide Advisory Board for suicide prevention activities and make all training and materials available to both the campus community and the community-at-large via the UPR-MSC website.