

Grantee Corner

Meet *Salud America!* Grantee Robert Dudley



Robert Dudley

As early as high school, Robert Dudley wanted to be a scientist—white coat, goggles, test tubes, the whole lab experience.

He even started working at a blood lab during college.

But the lab's educational director got Dudley involved in helping local high-school teachers learn about immunology and design projects for their classes.

"The experience gave me a love for education and the effect that science can have at the human level that moved me to go into medicine," said Dudley, who got his medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania and now is a pediatrician at the Community Health Center, Inc., a nonprofit that provides affordable health care in Connecticut.

Today Dudley is still using science to help people for his new *Salud America!*-supported pilot project, an evaluation of his center's Healthy Tomorrows for Teens (HTT) program and its ability to help teen girls at Connecticut's largest high school, New Britain. More than half of New Britain students are Latino.

HTT is an existing program that encourages healthy lifestyles among New Britain girls with nutrition counseling, YWCA fitness programs and community service projects.

But so far, Latinas haven't consistently participated in HTT.

So Dudley's pilot project, one of 20 funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation through *Salud America!* for \$75,000 over two years, aims to evaluate HTT's strengths and weaknesses to spawn new knowledge of what spurs participation by Latinas and improve the program's ability to engage Latina teens in healthy lifestyles.

"We want to understand and overcome barriers to consistent engagement by Latina teens," said Dudley.

In a recent survey of New Britain ninth-graders, Latinas were more likely to be obese and dissatisfied with their weight than their white or black counterparts. Latinas also were the least likely to be physically active.



Dr. Dudley's project will use Photovoice to research Latino children's activity and eating habits. Pictured is a group of Connecticut Latinas who made photo storyboards and presented them to officials.

More than half of Latinas at the school fail P.E. class, compared to 19 percent of whites.

"The magnitude of the obesity epidemic has really pushed us to target at-risk children and come up with innovative interventions," Dudley said.

Dudley's pilot project will conduct:

- Focus group/interviews/Photovoice with five Puerto Rican teen girls
- Five focus groups with at least 35 Latino parents
- Five focus groups with at least 35 Latina teens, three with HTT participants and two with non-HTT participants
- Exit interviews with at least four long-term HTT participants

Dudley hopes the results will improve and sustain the existing HTT program, make P.E. more acceptable to Latinas and help the school engage girls in other activities that may help address school P.E. failure and high pregnancy rates.

It will also help the Spanish Speaking Center in downtown New Britain better serve low-income Latinos, as well as help the local YWCA target its services to Latinas.

"We want these organizations to have the information needed to work together to improve services that help Latina teens live health lifestyles," Dudley said.

View a slideshow of Dr. Dudley's project

Healthy Tomorrows for Teens
A Mid-course Evaluation

Robert Dudley MD, MEd, FAAP
Community Health Center, Inc
New Britain, CT