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Authors

Woo, Benjamin KP

Chung, Jamie OP

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Moving the Dementia-related Stigma Dial among Chinese Americans

Benjamin K.P. Woo, M.D. [1], Jamie O.P. Chung, BA [1]

1. Asian Pacific Health Corps (APHC), University of California, Los Angeles, CA

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Letter to Editor (for publication)

Corresponding Author:

Benjamin K.P. Woo, M.D.

Department of Psychiatry & Biobehavioral Science

Olive View – UCLA Medical Center

14445 Olive View Drive, Cottage H1

Sylmar, CA 91342, USA

Phone: 747-210-3830; Fax: 747-210-3554; E-mail: bkpwoo@ucla.edu

With great interest, we read the systematic review by Herrmann et al. [1] examining 51 publications over the past decade on dementia-related stigma. This review highlighted the ongoing stigma, cultural, and language barriers that ethnic minorities face, which decreases their help-seeking behaviors and engagement in treatment services. The review also found that lack of knowledge, misconceptions about dementia, and ongoing stigma remain prevalent among Chinese Americans. The authors suggest that providing education and support may help to diminish stigma specifically among minority groups. We also believe that culturally sensitive short films, YouTube videos, and the recognition of dementia as a mental illness may further move the stigma dial among Chinese Americans.

Community programs (e.g. seminars) in Chinese language have been used to provide dementia education to Chinese American immigrants [2]. In 2015, we produced a 7-minute, Cantonese-language culturally sensitive short film, *A Day of the Wong's* (<https://vimeo.com/218242426>), to target dementia-related stigma in the Chinese community. We later incorporated the film into a Cantonese-language dementia seminar, and asked participants to fill out a Chinese-language dementia stigma questionnaire [3]. 89% of the ninety participants found the short film useful in lessening dementia stigma. This was particularly noticeable amongst individuals that had a higher baseline of dementia stigma, as well as a shorter duration of residence in the United States.

Language barriers may impede help-seeking behaviors. However, by eliminating the language barrier, as our group has done, it is possible to directly disseminate dementia information in the native language to help decrease stigma amongst Chinese American Immigrants. We utilized the social-media platform YouTube to avoid the language barrier through our Cantonese-language video lectures about dementia. Two videos which covered topics about dementia background, misconceptions, management, stigma, and prevention were uploaded to YouTube [4]. We found that YouTube as a platform was able to target older Chinese-speaking individuals residing in the United States. These individuals that watched our videos tended to be in the age group most at risk of developing dementia. Thus, healthcare providers should

further utilize social media (e.g. YouTube) to help dispel dementia misconceptions for the lay public and minority populations.

Among Asian Americans, there may be cultural stigma of mental illness in addition to dementia stigma. A recent study demonstrated that older Chinese Americans who perceived dementia as a mental illness had better dementia understanding [5]. However, Chinese Americans that did not identify dementia as a mental illness were also significantly more likely to misunderstand dementia prognosis. Thus, we recommend that future dementia health campaigns within the Chinese American community should also focus awareness on its origin as a mental illness. While there are few evidence-based interventions that target dementia-related stigma, we believe that involving media workers and healthcare providers in promoting dementia knowledge and anti-stigma efforts will be essential to move the dial on dementia-related stigma.

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