

Clínica Martín-Baró: La Comunidad Cura “Healing within Community”

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A long-term fight has been ongoing to ensure the well-being of communities' health. In 2010, a comprehensive health care reform law known as the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act ensured the expansion of insurance access for the American population by disregarding pre-existing health conditions and expanding employer coverage. Given ACA restrictions, undocumented individuals were still unable to qualify for benefits of the ACA.¹

Undocumented immigrants are a vulnerable population at risk for chronic diseases that may both be influenced by social and genetic factors in the United States.² Additionally, political fear of deportation can lead to conflicting experiences of inclusivity negatively impacting their self-esteem and mental and emotional health.³ Without healthcare access, the majority of undocumented immigrants rely heavily on safety-net health care providers, including emergency departments and community health centers and clinics.^{4,5}

Clínica Martín-Baró (CMB), a student-run free clinic operating in the heart of the Mission District of San Francisco, provides free healthcare for primarily undocumented, low-income, Spanish-speaking individuals. Following psychologist Dr. Ignacio Martín-Baró's philosophy that one's health

is intimately tied to one's individual psyche and environmental collective experiences, CMB aims to nourish a community-centered approach to wellness for patients.⁶ While many student-run free clinics provide adequate primary care services, CMB is noteworthy in its holistic approach to health, comprising community partnerships, physical and mental health education, and monthly support groups in order to challenge healthcare barriers within the undocumented community and to provide them with various resources to meet their social, cultural, and linguistic needs.

Getting to know the community

CMB's work requires a deep understanding of the population it serves to address the health, social, and political trauma that influence its patient population. Learning from patients' experiences, taking and leading academic courses, and participating in social organizing movements, San Francisco State University (SFSU) and University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine (UCSF) student volunteers learn how to best advocate for patients in a culturally sensitive manner.

SFSU volunteers with different educational backgrounds are recruited from the College of

Ethnic Studies under the Latinx Studies and Race and Resistance Studies departments. These courses deepen one's social consciousness and understanding of various histories and cultures of communities of color throughout the world. Furthermore, UCSF medical student coordinators organize and run a semester-long lunch elective, titled "Family and Community Medicine: Contemporary Issues in Latinx Health." This course strives to inform students on a wide variety of topics impacting Latinx health, ranging from hostile xenophobic attitudes to improving mental health services for immigrant populations. Students from both SFSU and UCSF are encouraged then to incorporate these didactic lessons and to apply these principles when interacting with patients and the community.

Volunteering at CMB plays a critical role in fostering future community advocates in all fields to not only work with cultural competency but also become lifelong advocates for social justice. Solidarity and resilience against anti-immigrant rhetoric unite CMB volunteers at political rallies and community events. These courses highlight the importance of inter-professional collaboration when tackling issues of healthcare access, xenophobia, and intergenerational trauma. Collectively with patients, CMB provides instrumental, informational, and emotional support to address and prevent health disparities, while creating a healing space through community activities, engagements, and collaborations.

Political climate, mental, physical, and environmental health effects within the undocumented community

The current Trump administration has exacerbated the fear and anxiety experienced in the daily life of undocumented populations. Due to the fear of deportation, many often hide in the shadows and may not receive the necessary resources needed to live a dignified life. This was only amplified during the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids in the Mission District, where the mainly Latinx community filled with people, music, and livelihood, transformed

into a more silent, empty, and abandoned area. In addition, some patients also experienced the trauma of surviving the inhumane conditions and treatment of detention centers at the US-Mexico border.⁷

With today's political climate, Martín-Baró's philosophy strongly resonates with CMB's work while helping the majority of its undocumented population. He believed western medicine often fails to consider how generational, environmental, and other factors induce trauma onto the body, which is why CMB not only treats physical wounds but also improves mental health through support services with Felix Kury, El Círculo (The Circle), and free events connecting patients with the community through Grupo de Apoyo (Support Group).⁸ Through these services, CMB is able to build a community and become a support system for CMB's patients, allowing them to start the process of healing while also enabling them to feel empowered to overcome the trauma of immigrating.

Defying healthcare barriers for undocumented health: community sanctuaries and collaborations

A majority of CMB's Latinx patient population immigrates from various Latin America countries, including but not limited to Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Mexico, and El Salvador, to escape various social, environmental, and political systems in their home countries. In early 2018, the formation of 10,000 people from Latin American left their homelands in hopes of receiving asylum in the United States by forming a Caravan.⁹ With the vast number of communities leaving their homelands, governments were not prepared to support the Caravaneros. CMB and community organizations collaborated to help aid the camps in which the Caravaneros were located to provide free healthcare, legal resources, and supplies (eg, clothing, blankets, hygiene products, and shoes).

Over this time, CMB fundraised and established community partnerships with La Radio Flash (The Radio Flash), the School of

Nursing at UCSF, Border Angels, high school educators and students, and transnational clinics such as Wound Clinic in Tijuana, Mexico to collectively challenge healthcare barriers placed upon undocumented immigrants and to bring forward social equity and wellbeing of the community's health.

CMB later participated in panels which fostered community amongst healthcare providers to discuss immigration health and support, specifically with respect to mental health. With the current political climate, trauma and isolation experienced within the undocumented community is often overlooked and translated onto both parents and their children.

Conclusion: Healing within Community

Fostered by Ignacio Martin-Baró's philosophy, CMB strives to understand and enrich the social and political circumstances of its immigrant patient population. Through community engagement, organizing, and partnerships, CMB continues this multifaceted community approach by not only addressing and challenging health disparities but also aiming to collectively empower patients to become health and social justice advocates for themselves and their surrounding community.

From the various support programs provided to patients, CMB cultivates a holistic approach to health that emphasizes cultural competency with healing. Much is learned about structural vulnerability, the narratives of individuals, and the importance of collective work that shapes and transforms health. With the current political climate, CMB is a representation of a community rising together through the exchange of valuable knowledge and personal experiences.

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