



Clínica Martín-Baró: Community Healing Through Patient-Centered Care

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Background

Latinx range in diversity through cultural, social, economic, and experiential differences. Compared to non-Hispanic Whites, Latinx's may display lower socioeconomic status due to generalized trends in family income, educational attainment, occupational characteristics, and asset accumulation.¹ It is believed that these social determinants of health affect an individual's quality of life by increasing the likelihood of disease development and mental health outcomes that can in part explain current health disparities among Latinx.^{2,3} Clínica Martín-Baró's (CMB) mission is to identify, address, and help overcome such determinants of health.

CMB is a student-run clinic operating in the heart of the Mission District of San Francisco, California. In partnerships with University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) and San Francisco State University (SFSU), CMB aims to provide free dental, vision, mental health, and basic primary care services to those who are marginalized due to cultural, income, education, occupational, and social barriers. CMB's philosophy was designed after psychologist and philosopher, Ignacio Martín-Baró. Dr. Martín-Baró emphasized the importance of a preferential option for the poor and those who are most marginalized and oppressed due to socioeconomic, political, and/or educational barriers.⁴ CMB fosters Dr. Martín-Baró's ideology, prioritizing prevention of disease through education at the core of its care delivery.

Operation and Organization

CMB manages itself in an egalitarian fashion rather than the common conventional hierarchical structure. SFSU and UCSF volunteers share all responsibilities and decision making amongst each other while operating its daily tasks. Our clinic creates a unique space where patients,

community members, and volunteers have the opportunity to support and learn from one another.

Saturday Clinic

At the core of each CMB visit, a SFSU volunteer, known as a patient advocate (PA), and a UCSF first-year medical student are assigned to each patient. Medical students and PAs do a full medical assessment of each patient. Thereafter, a treatment plan is created by the preceptor, medical student, and PA to best address a patient's chief concerns. Throughout this process, the PA's goals are to empower patients through assistance with interpretation, attentive listening, and advocacy. Listening to patients is the core of our patient-centered care model where we gather an optimal social history, encompassing both mental and physical health, in order to uncover the root cause of distress and disease.

El Círculo (The Circle)

When a patient is not in the exam room, patients are encouraged to sit in a circle along with other volunteers, medical students, and doctors and to learn about various health topics, share life experiences, and, most importantly, become more conscious of themselves and the social reality that structures their lives. This idea is known as “concientización” and is a fundamental principle of liberation psychology that has been implemented to CMB’s framework. Concientización allows individuals to become cognitive of their surroundings, allowing for opportunities of change and for progress to occur. The unique dialogue in El Círculo creates a space for all to be heard, promotes relationships to flourish, combats the issue of “isolation,” and empowers patients overall to take control of their reality. CMB works towards providing patients with our services by using this principle.

Volunteer Recruitment

SFSU volunteers are mainly recruited from five Latinx Studies courses offered at SFSU. These courses elucidate health, social, and political traumas that may influence one’s dimension of health and explain the story behind CMB’s mission. Potential volunteers range from different educational backgrounds that encompass health education, political science, biology, computer science, history, and psychology. Our diverse volunteer backgrounds expand our workforce to better understand and address the health care disparities seen today.

Funding

CMB has sustained itself free from corporate investments or federal grants for over ten years. We are rooted in social justice and strongly believe that the health-for-profit model contributes to the health disparities that continue to exist in the health care system today. For this reason, all funds used to provide the free services at CMB come from community donations, fundraisers, and partnering organizations.

Mental Health Services

Martín-Baró philosophies have also resonated with CMB's mental health program.

Psychotherapist, SFSU Program Director, and sole mental health provider, Felix Kury, has been a strong proponent of holism; the idea that physical, emotional, and mental health is affected not only on a biological level but also a social, economic, cultural, environmental, and political level.

CMB's patients have experienced an array of stressors that include but are not limited to homelessness due to gentrification, physical abuse, loss of family members due to gun violence and/or political violence, and the traumatic experiences after fleeing their home country. Felix Kury considers these nuanced situations as an avenue to heal and support patients.

Community Healing: “Grupo de Apoyo”

Latinx immigrants in the United States often face many barriers that impact their quality of life. These include limited access to adequate food, health care, housing, and social services. Meeting these basic necessities can often become a stressor when adjusting to a new society, and often times, individuals neglect the impact it has on their mental health. Additionally, the presence of these confining structures can create social isolation and has been linked to the manifestation of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, psychotic disorders, and suicide.

To combat these economic and social isolation barriers, CMB recently created a community support group, known as “El Grupo de Apoyo.” CMB's first Grupo de Apoyo incorporated a dinner event called Noche de Cena where the clinic was transformed into a venue providing food, music, and lotería. The purpose of this event was to create a safe space, trusting relationship, and community with patients given the political climate and isolation patients face. Additionally, CMB organized a trip to the Oakland Zoo and ensured that it was a family-oriented event that aligned with the patients' needs. It was the first time for many patients and their children to visit the zoo without worrying about finances and/or sustenance and enjoying their time with and among each other. Until this day, 90% of CMB's volunteers have been able to contribute and/or create a community event for the “Grupo de Apoyo,” thus allowing for volunteers to organize and engage with the community.

Over the years, CMB has extended its passion in outreaching to neighborhood organizations and establishing partnerships to effectively combat the various social, financial, and health issues faced by the community. A small community center called El Jardín Secreto provides an extended safe space for the community to promote social gatherings among the patients through movie nights, as well as cooking and dancing events. In addition, CMB has partnered with People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Justice (PODER) and the Good Samaritan Family Resource Center to find people-powered solutions to various environmental, economic, and social injustices facing low-income Latinx immigrants and communities of color in San Francisco. Without community support, it is hard to create—let alone imagine—change for the better of our patients.

Diversifying Health Care

CMB's unique framework has not only impacted the lives of patients but has also motivated its volunteers to strive for higher education. Between 2005 to 2016, 62% of CMB volunteers were accepted into medical school, 11% were admitted to a nursing program, and 7% were matriculated into a graduate level public health program (unpublished data). Each volunteer gains great knowledge from their experiences at CMB, and it is our goal to support our first-generation college students so that they can return and serve their home communities.

Summary

In brief, the impact of CMB's unique multi-faceted approach transcends the lives of both patients and volunteers in a continual fashion. CMB aims to bridge the disconnect of Western medicine to Latinx values, while striving to prioritize holistic and patient-centered approaches. In fostering such care, our work is leveraged by individuals who face various socioeconomic, political, and/or educational barriers that hinder them from accessing resources to meet medical, social, and educational needs. Fostered by Martín-Baró's framework of liberation psychology, CMB has provided care to over 1000 patients, while also providing a safe space for patients to come together, share lived experiences, and engage in community healing despite levels of marginalization.

References

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