

Findings from the Engage for Health Collaboration



Project Background

The Engage for Health project was a statewide collaboration led by the NNLM Middle Atlantic Region (MAR) and the Pennsylvania Library Association (PaLA). The NNLM MAR is one of PaLA's partners in a statewide literacy initiative called PA Forward, an initiative to engage libraries in activities that address five types of literacy. The Engage for Health project team was composed of Lydia Collins of NNLM MAR, Kathy Silks, former Project Manager of the PaLA PA Forward initiative, Susan Jeffery, Director of the North Pocono Public Library, and Cindy Olney of the NNLM Evaluation office, who joined the team to lead a collaborative project evaluation and improve the evaluation skills of the cohort librarians.

Along with teaching the Engage for Health sessions in their communities, librarians from 17 cohort libraries participated in all phases of the planning and evaluation process. The objectives of PA Forward include improving health literacy among residents of Pennsylvania, so the Engage for Health sessions focused on teaching participants strategies for improving communication with their health care providers and researching health issues using quality online health resources. All participants were shown how to use MedlinePlus. Classes geared toward older adults also covered NIHSeniorHealth.

Evaluation findings

The cohort librarians reported attendance of 150 adult participants who were part of the user populations for the 17 cohort libraries. They used a pre-post assessment evaluation form that they all helped to develop. Librarians collected evaluation forms from 132 (88%) of participants.

Here are the key findings from the evaluation:

- The program was well received, with 98% of participants rating it positively. The evaluation forms indicated that 92% of the 16 participants had never used MedlinePlus (78% had never heard of MedlinePlus and 15% had heard of it but never used it.)
- The participants did report that they prepared for doctors' visits. Before the training session, most said they sometimes or almost always researched their health conditions (78%), made lists of their medications (78%), and wrote out their health questions (68%). Almost everyone (95%) asked questions of health care providers when they didn't understand something and 86% said they were comfortable doing so.

These were the positive outcomes from the project assessment:

- The workshop presented new information to participants. Seventy-eight percent of participants did not know about MedlinePlus at the beginning of the session and another 15% had heard about it but had never used it. After class, 72% said they were somewhat or very likely to use MedlinePlus or NIHSenior Health to research their own health issue and 75% said they were somewhat or very likely to tell others about MedlinePlus.
- Despite the fact that most participants were conscientious about preparing for doctors' visits before attending this class, the majority said the class improved their ability to find health information they trusted (93%), use MedlinePlus to research their health conditions (86%), and prepare for doctor's visits (92%).
- Thirty-six participants (28%) said they found it somewhat or very difficult to find health information online. At the end of the session, 71% of these participants said in their pre-session form that they would use MedlinePlus or NIHSeniorHealth to research their health issues and 72% said they would tell others about MedlinePlus. Ninety-two percent said the class improved their ability to find information they could trust and 97% said the class improved

their ability to use MedlinePlus. Ninety-two percent said the program improved their ability to prepare for health appointments.

- Thirty-five participants (27%) said on their pre-session form that they seldom used the Internet for online health information. After the session, 50% said they were likely to use MedlinePlus or NIHSeniorHealth to research their health questions and 61% said they were likely to tell others about or show them MedlinePlus. Seventy-one percent said the class improved their ability to find information they could trust and 51% said the class improved their ability to use MedlinePlus. Seventy-one percent said the program improved their ability to prepare for health appointments.

The project team also hoped that the collaboration would enhance the professional skills of the cohort librarians. At the first in-person workshop, which drew 17 librarians from the participating librarians, the project team requested their feedback via an evaluation form. Sixteen of the 17 participants said the training workshop, held in State College in October, improved their confidence to conduct the *Engage for Health* sessions for their communities. Sixteen said the workshop improved their ability to plan projects of this nature. Fifteen said the training session improved their confidence to develop useful evaluation questionnaires and that they were likely to apply the evaluation information in other projects at their libraries.

In the final in-person meetings, held in Harrisburg in April, 16 cohort librarians interviewed each other about their experiences with the *Engage for Health* project. Each librarian submitted a written statement that described what they valued most about being part of the collaboration. Here is a sample of the parts of the experiences they found most valuable:

- Being able to form partnerships with health care providers and organizations in their communities.
- Seeing their users engage with the class information and understanding how important it is to become an active participant in understanding and managing your health.
- Networking with colleagues.
- Improving their evaluation skills.