

# Using *Fotonovelas* to Promote Healthy Eating in a Latino Community

Melanie Sberna Hinojosa, PhD, David Nelson, PhD, Ramon Hinojosa, PhD, Angelica Delgado, MS, Bernadette Witzack, MA, Magdalisse Gonzalez, BA, William Elliott, PhD, Jennifer Steiner, MA, Maria Fontanez, AAS, and Rene Farias, BA

## AN IDENTIFIED NEED EXISTS

for culturally relevant and linguistically appropriate health literacy strategies for Latinos. These photos are the product of a community based participatory research project to create a *fotonovela*—a graphic novel familiar to and popular with many Latinos—to support healthy eating in Latino families. The collaboration between *Centro De La Comunidad Unida*/United Community Center (UCC) and the Medical College of Wisconsin began with a series of focus groups held at UCC. Latinos living in the community expressed concern that available health education materials were unattractive, difficult to read, and poorly translated. However, participants also indicated interest in learning more about obesity and obesity-related chronic conditions. Like other Latinos nationwide, they lacked culturally and linguistically appropriate nutrition materials to address this issue.

Our research team worked alongside community members to create a *fotonovela* (see next page). Participating community members actively shaped the content and issues in the *fotonovela* to ensure it was relevant to the culture, ethnicity, gender, social class, and language of the community and specific to identified community health needs. Group discussion and problem solving

were inherent in developing the *fotonovela*. Contributing community team members cooperatively shared ideas and discussed life situations and health concerns to create the story line. The final product conveys ideas and information that other community members can relate to and apply in their own families. This approach empowers the community by encouraging members with few resources to communicate specific individual and general community health concerns.

During a 14-month period in 2009 and 2010, a group of women came together at the UCC to learn about health and nutrition. These women were given cameras and used their newly gained knowledge to create this story about one family's discovery of healthy habits. The *fotonovela* was set in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and all photos and individuals depicted in the *fotonovela* come from the community surrounding UCC. The *fotonovela* includes nutrition information, a recipe, and community-based nutrition and health resources. The overarching goal of this *fotonovela* is to prevent chronic disease by teaching and developing positive health habits for families. Our team is currently developing two more *fotonovelas* on critical community topics: depression and dementia caregiving. ■

## About the Authors

At the time of the study, Melanie Sberna Hinojosa was with the Department of Family and Community Medicine, Medical College of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. David A. Nelson and Bernadette Witzack are with the Department of Family and Community Medicine, Medical College of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. Ramon Hinojosa was with the Department of Social and Cultural Sciences, Marquette University, Milwaukee. Angelica Delgado, Magdalisse Gonzalez, Jennifer Steiner, Maria Fontanez, and Rene Farias are with the Centro de la Comunidad Unida (United Community Center), Milwaukee. William Elliott is a consultant based in Milwaukee.

Correspondence should be sent to Melanie Sberna Hinojosa, Department of Health Outcomes and Policy, Institute for Child Health Policy, University of Florida, PO Box 100177, Gainesville, FL 32611-0177. (e-mail: mhinojosa@ichp.ufl.edu). Reprints can be ordered at <http://www.ajph.org> by clicking the "Reprints/Eprints" link.

This article was accepted April 22, 2010.

doi:10.2105/AJPH.2010.198994

## Contributors

M.S. Hinojosa originated the study and supervised all aspects of its implementation. D.A. Nelson, R. Hinojosa, and R. Farias assisted with the study and the development of evaluation procedures. B. Witzack, A. Delgado, and M. Gonzalez managed all aspects of recruitment, enrollment, data collection, institutional review board, and photography. W. Elliott managed all aspects of the *fotonovela* development related to photography. J. Steiner and M. Fontanez managed all aspects of *fotonovela* production.

## Acknowledgments

This project was made possible by a grant from the Healthier Wisconsin Partnership Program (2008I-42) and a National Research Service Award grant

through the Health Resources Services Administration (T32-RP10030-08).

## Human Participant Protection

Institutional review board approval was obtained through the Medical College of Wisconsin and all human participants consented to participate in the study.



Let's start with the vegetables that we need for dinner. Elena what's on the list?

Peppers, onions mangos, and limes.

I'll get the onions.

7

We still need tortillas. Which ones should we get?

I picked two kinds of tortillas.

I don't understand this label. What are we looking for?

Let's read the nutrition labels to see which ones are the healthiest. We should focus on three things: the serving size, the amount of calories in each serving, and the calories from fat.

8

I'm hungry! What's for dinner? How was the grocery store?

We bought a lot of fruit and vegetables and the kids were a huge help at the store. We're making chicken fajitas tonight! I know you usually like beef, but I thought I'd try chicken because I've heard it is a leaner and healthier meat.

Dad are you going to cook with us?

Sure, I can help.

Wait, Should I use vegetable oil or lard?

Oil is healthier than lard, let's use that.

11

Hi Esperanza! How are you guys? I have great news! Pabito had his check-up today and the doctor said all our changes in diet and exercise helped! Pabito's health is improving.

That's great!!! I am so happy for you both!

This is just the beginning of the Gomez family's journey to a healthier lifestyle. There will be obstacles along the way, but making good choices about diet and exercise will help them achieve their new goals of better health for the whole family.

15

**Esperanza Para La Salud: Pasos Para una Alimentacion Saludable (Hope for Health: Steps to Healthy Eating).** Source. **Centro de la Comunidad Unida (United Community Center).**