

CDC/ATSDR Establishes Workgroup To Enhance Hispanic Representation

By William C. Parra, MS

Closing the Gap, Hispanic Agenda for Action • October 1998

Known as the Nation's prevention agency, HHS's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) collaborates closely with State and local health departments, academic institutions, professional and community organizations, school systems, industry, and labor. Its 6,500 employees are assigned to state and major city health departments, national organizations, and throughout the world to help translate CDC recommendations into improved health outcomes.

Although Hispanics currently represent almost 10 percent of the Civilian Labor Force, their representation in the Federal Government is substantially lower. Hispanics are underrepresented in 95 percent of all Federal agencies with more than 500 employees and represent less than 6 percent of the Federal workforce.

As of October 1, 1997, 172 employees had self-identified as Hispanic at CDC and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), constituting approximately 2.6 percent of the total workforce. Hispanics are the only racial and ethnic minority to be consistently underrepresented in all six major job categories and in all of the agency's organizational entities.

The causes for Hispanic underrepresentation need to be well understood to increase the number of well-qualified Hispanic men and women in Federal positions. At CDC/ATSDR, Hispanic underrepresentation results in lost opportunities to focus on the research needs of Hispanic populations and to develop culturally competent intervention strategies that can effectively reach Hispanic communities.

On September 8, 1997, a CDC/ATSDR workgroup on Hispanic Recruitment and Retention was formed. Its purpose was to develop targeted plans to improve the representation of Hispanics at the agency. The workgroup completed its recommendations on November 26, 1997. It began the process by conducting a needs assessment survey among Hispanic employees in the agency.

The survey was based on a similar instrument administered in September 1991 and focused on three main areas: (1) recruitment patterns; (2) job satisfiers and dissatisfiers which ultimately influence retention; and (3) recommendations to improve Hispanic recruitment and retention.

The survey had some limitations. It was not distributed to Hispanic employees who had left the agency to determine why they had left and was only directed to individuals who self-identify as Hispanic.

The survey had a 48.5 percent response rate. Almost 60 percent of the respondents were recruited to CDC via word of mouth, and almost 50 percent were recruited from other Federal, state, and local government jobs. Approximately 50 percent were recruited from the historically high-Hispanic-population states.

Several factors were found to influence individuals to accept a job: (1) salary; (2) location; (3) opportunity for advancement, and (4) challenge. Respondents ranked the agency favorably on all of these factors except opportunity for

advancement. Factors most likely to *influence individuals to leave CDC/ATSDR* were: (1) limited opportunity for advancement; (2) family responsibilities; (3) discrimination; and (4) failure to meet personal needs and goals. Conversely, factors most likely to *retain employees at CDC/ATSDR* were: (1) better opportunities for advancement; (2) better mentoring programs; and (3) increased Hispanic health focus.

Approximately 60 percent of the respondents had a master's degree or higher, and over 60 percent were at a GS-13 grade level or higher. Because it was felt that individuals with less education or those at lower grade levels may rate job satisfiers/dissatisfiers differently, a cross tabulation was conducted on these two factors. No significant differences were found.

The workgroup recommended that CDC/ATSDR proactively expand its recruitment efforts to bring vacancies to the attention of highly qualified Hispanics. Such efforts, if successful, should help increase CDC/ATSDR's proportion of Hispanics in the workforce from 2.6 percent in October 1997 to a level of 11.1 percent at the end of year 2005.

The goal of attaining parity in 2005 would apply to all job categories and all organizational entities within CDC/ATSDR and would reflect an annual 1.1 percentage point increase in the proportion of Hispanic employees at the agency.

To reach parity, CDC/ATSDR's recruitment efforts would have to result in an increase in the number of Hispanic employees from the current level of 172 to 721 in year 2005, equalling an average increase of about 69 new Hispanics a year, assuming the successful retention of all Hispanics who are currently employed.

Strategies found to successfully recruit Hispanics include: (1) word of mouth, an extremely important method, requiring improved support and expansion of employees' personal and professional networks; (2) better use of internships and fellowships that could serve as conduits for the future recruitment of individuals currently enrolled in schools of medicine and other health professions; (3) expansion of current cooperative agreements with the Association of Schools of Public Health, the Association of Teachers of Preventive Medicine, and the Minority Health Professions Foundation to better target Hispanic students or research issues; (4) active participation in the National Internship Program administered by the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities; (5) special incentives, such as reimbursement of moving expenses to recruit Hispanics; and (6) implementation of the educational loan deferment and repayment plan approved in Congress.

Strategies found to retain Hispanic employees include: (1) Hispanic employee advisory groups to address issues that provide Hispanics with a mechanism for increased input, influence, and empowerment; (2) a research agenda that addresses Hispanic health issues, including a closer look at morbidity and mortality in Hispanic populations; (3) long-term communication chan-

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nels with Hispanic communities; (4) a nondiscriminatory work environment; (5) increase in the number of Hispanic employees in decision-making positions; (6) retention bonuses; and (7) equal access to career development opportunities.

William C. Parra, MS, chairs the CDC/ATSDR workgroup and serves as deputy director of the National Center of Environmental Health. ❖

