From Epidemiology to Health Promotion: A Health Disparities Research Trajectory

In this presentation, I will attempt to illustrate the trajectory of my research journey which began conducting basic social and behavioral research, mainly in aging and epidemiology in Hispanic populations, and which has gradually evolved into translational research. In considering the highlights of this journey, I will elaborate on how results yielded by the Border Epidemiologic Study of Aging (BESA), a twelve year, four wave panel study of middle age and aging, led to my current study, a behavioral modification intervention. The overarching long term goals of this intervention, known as Beyond Sabor, are the prevention (weight control) or reduction of overweight and obesity; and the prevention, delay of the onset, or improved management of diabetes in a population of urban and rural adult Mexican Americans in the Lower Rio Grande (Valley) of Texas. The 5-year intervention study, funded by the National Center for Minorities and Health Disparities, is framed within a community based participatory research approach and employs a random cluster design of 32 randomized sites and a minimum of 782 participants to assess the intervention efficacy. Although Beyond Sabor is currently in the field with data collection not yet completed, some preliminary findings will be discussed. In closing, I will also elaborate on how I expect to translate findings from our current study on religion and health among Mexican Americans, funded by the National Institute on Aging, into future interventions that may reduce the waiting period between symptoms and seeking medical care among this population. In sum, three NIH funded studies will be employed in illustrating the unfolding of a bidirectional relationship between basic behavioral and translational research in my work.