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Title: SCIENCE CAFÉS: ENGAGING SCIENTISTS AND COMMUNITY THROUGH HEALTH AND SCIENCE DIALOGUE

CTSA Hub: Medical College of Wisconsin, CTSI
Phase(s) of Translational Science Addressed: T3/T4

Long-term outcomes: Partnership with Milwaukee Public Library to provide location for Science Cafés; Measurement tool for Health and Science Literacy; Infrastructure to identify topics of interest from Community

Background: The Science Café program engages the community in discussions of health science issues in an informal and interactive setting.

Purpose: The Community Engagement Key Function (CEKF) of the Clinical and Translational Science Institute (CTSI) of Southeast Wisconsin have been developing and implementing Science Cafés as a means to create bi-directional dialogue between researchers and the community. We have focused on the following goals:

1. Strengthen Science Literacy.
2. Transfer knowledge between translational researchers and an inquisitive public.
3. Demonstrate the important role science plays in society.
4. Demonstrate the important role the community plays in science.
5. Create opportunities for CTSI of Southeast Wisconsin faculty, staff, students and public to engage one another on health related issues in an environment outside an academic setting.
6. Inspire the public to be more comfortable interacting with scientific and/or medical experts.
7. Inspire scientific and/or medical experts to be more comfortable discussing science and health issues with the public.
8. Create environment for community to teach CTSI faculty about issues around community literacy and applicability.

Methods: The format of the Café involves a medical professional or researcher engaging with public in an informal, non-academic environment. Typically, the speaker will give a 15-20 minute background on the evening’s topic, in which topics were collaboratively decided upon by input from the community. This is followed by 30-60 minutes of a discussion among the community and speaker around the specific topic. The casual atmosphere is conducive for participants to ask questions and engage in conversation. The cafés are always held in a public setting and are free.

A systematic evaluation of the impact of Science Cafés on attendees’ self-confidence related to five health and scientific literacy concepts showed statistically significant increases across all items (Mean differences between mean retrospective pre-scores and post-scores, one tailed, paired samples t-test, n= 141, p <.0001 for all items). The evaluation provides important evidence supporting the effectiveness of brief, casual dialogue as a way to increase the public’s self-rated confidence in health and science topics.

Translational Science Workforce: Our speakers span various phases of translational science and are prepared to interact with community at the Science Cafés. Our evaluation reflects how well the attendees understood what the speaker talked about and whether they find the topic relevant in their own lives.

Products: Video segments: https://ctsi.mcw.edu/community/science-cafe/videos/
