ABSTRACT

Background
Over the counter (OTC) medication use is common practice among refugees resettling in the US with as many as 70% indicating use of OTC for self-care during their first year of resettlement. Existing cultural and language differences present in resettling refugees explain our prior experiences identifying a lack of understanding in use of OTC medication. The objective of this project was to develop a new methodology for teaching the use of OTC for newly arriving refugees.

Methods
An evaluation of the pictograms was done using a convenience sample of 50 refugees. Based upon the most commonly used OTC medication, three series of pictograms, each consisting of approximately 20 pictograms, were developed and used as teaching aids. The pictograms described minor health ailments among both adults and children such as fever, cough & cold, and diarrhea. Images of common medications and instructions on proper use were used.

Results
The evaluation indicated that 92% of the refugees were able to successfully identify the meaning of the pictograms used, but results differed among various ethnic refugee groups. Adding text in native languages improved the overall understanding of the pictogram.

Conclusions
Use of pictograms is an effective tool to educate refugees regarding the safe use of OTC medication. Understanding can be enhanced by using text in their native language in addition to the pictogram. Based on the success of this program, the use of pictograms may be expanded into other areas of refugee care and orientation.

INTRODUCTION

Newly arriving refugees often face several barriers to health post-resettlement. These barriers can stem from access to care while living in a refugee camp [1]. Many refugees lack an understanding of the healthcare system, which affects their ability to care for minor health ailments. Refugees with limited English skills can have difficulties reading and comprehending medication instructions and prescriptions. Over the counter (OTC) medication use is common practice among refugees resettling in the US with as many of 70% indicating use of OTC for self-care during their first year of resettlement. Existing cultural and language differences present in resettling refugees explain our prior experiences identifying a lack of understanding in use of OTC medication. The objective of this project was to develop a new methodology for teaching the use of OTC for newly arriving refugees.

MATERIALS & METHODS

Based upon the most commonly used over-the-counter medication, three sets of approximately 20 pictograms were developed. The pictograms were used to represent minor health ailments, over-the-counter medication, recommended dosage, frequency, and instructions.

RESULTS

Approximately 92% of pictograms were successfully identified with the intended instructional uses. Comparisons were made between different language groups, this variation ranged from 72% among Somali refugees, up to 97%. Spanish speaking refugees consistently tested above average throughout the study with 94% correctly identified the recommended OTC use. Adding text in refugee’s native language improved the overall understanding of the sequence, which reinforces the results from research completed by Nadir Kheir. This study was also conducted with a culturally diverse priority population [2].

CONCLUSIONS

Use of pictograms is an effective tool to educate newly resettled refugees from Cuba, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Nepal regarding the safe use of common OTC medication. Refugee’s understanding can be enhanced by using text in their native language in addition to the pictogram.

Based on the success of this prospective cohort study, the use of pictograms may be expanded into other areas of refugee care and orientation. This expansion could include distribution of various educational materials based upon necessary community-specific public health issues.

REFERENCES