

CULTURAL COMPETENCE MENTAL HEALTH SUMMIT XVIII By Sam Keo, Psy.D.



The Cultural Competence Mental Health Summit XVIII was held at the Hilton San Diego Resort on December 6 and 7, 2012. Approximately 500 attendees were present. The theme for this year was “Beyond the Talk, Practicing the Walk: A Path to Bridge the Cultural Gap.” The conference consisted of two keynote speakers, one plenary panel, 32 workshops and multiple media advocacy campaign showcases.

The first keynote, Dr. King Davis, Director of the Institute for Urban Policy Research and Analysis at the University of Texas at Austin, focused on the dilemmas that have hindered the acceptance and application of cultural competency in clinical practice, prevention, research, professional education, public policy, and social justice. He described the current outcome of the presidential election as a basis for redefining cultural competency and for identifying specific strategies and plans for its successful implementation. On social issues, Dr. Davis compared the challenges of President Barack Obama to President Abraham Lincoln, point by point. He challenged participants to write and speak to their congressional representatives to set up a White House Conference on racial and diverse ethnicities in 2014.

Rachel G. Guerrero, retired Chief of the Office of Multicultural Services at the California Department of Mental Health, was the second keynote speaker. Ms. Guerrero declared that it is time to disengage the talk of “disparities” in regard to community mental health services for Latino communities and move toward defining and implementing solutions. With the understanding that disparities are statewide, solutions can be existed locally.

The plenary panel reported that the California Reducing Disparities Project (CRDP) manual is completed and it will be posted on the website by January 2013. This comprehensive project focuses on five populations which are represented by the following groups: African American, Asian and Pacific Islander, Native American, Latino and LGBTQ. The group representatives would

like mental health professionals, interested persons and especially mental health administrators to take a look at this wonderfully developed CRDP manual instead of leaving it on the nice bookshelf with other well-written manuals.

On the second day, Alfredo Aguirre, Director of Behavioral Health in San Diego County and co-chair of CMHDA – Cultural Competency, Equity and Social Justice Committee acknowledged all the 58 County Ethnic Services Managers (ESM) in California. ESMs are the eyes, ears and conscience of the public mental health system in California. Five distinguished ESM were called to the stage to receive a special recognition. Dr. Sandra Chang Ptasinski from the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health was one of them.

