



HFA Announces Grant Project Aimed at Understanding Advance Care Planning Needs of Underserved Communities

WASHINGTON, Jan. 8, 2018 – Hospice Foundation of America (HFA) this month will launch an exciting, 14-month grant initiative funded by the John and Wauna Harman (jwH) Foundation that aims to engage underserved communities in advance care planning (ACP) activities.

Hospice Foundation of America will use the end-of-life conversation game, *Hello*, to support a collaborative research project led by Lauren Jodi Van Scoy, M.D. at Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center through her research program, Project Talk. The research component of the project, also funded by the jwH Foundation, aims to provide a significant contribution to the field by yielding information about the ACP needs of African Americans and about the value of the activity on ACP behaviors in other underrepresented population groups.

Hello, a game developed by the Philadelphia-based company, Common Practice, has been found to stimulate substantive, enjoyable and meaningful end-of-life discussions among participants. Research has shown that more than 70 percent of participants who played the game went on to perform additional ACP actions. However, that body of research is currently limited by a primarily Caucasian or South Asian Indian demographic.

“Learning how to effectively engage the African American community in advance care planning activities is so important if we’re to really make a difference in improving the end-of-life experience for our patients,” said Dr. Lauren Jodi Van Scoy, a pulmonary and critical care physician who conducts research around advance care planning interventions.

It is well-established that African Americans have historically low rates of ACP completion when compared to Caucasians and that they often receive overly aggressive and unwanted care at the end of life. Thus, learning how best to engage the African American communities in ACP activities is critical to improving access to and quality of end-of-life care. Research has indicated that African Americans are more likely to have informal discussions about ACP issues than they are to complete advance directives, suggesting that a conversation-focused tool such as *Hello*, rather than an advance direction completion intervention, may be more appropriate.

“Conversations with loved ones about end-of-life preferences are the first, and perhaps the most important step someone can take when it comes to making sure their care wishes are carried out,” said Amy Tucci, HFA president and CEO. “*Hello* provides a unique approach to encourage those conversations. We are looking forward to working with Dr. Van Scoy and the *Hello* developers, Jethro Heiko and Nick Jehlen, to provide an opportunity for people to have end-of-life care conversations in a community setting while we learn from them about how to better support end-of-life decision-making.”

HFA, which recently completed a successful national awareness campaign on the importance of ACP through the Frontline PBS film *Being Mortal*, also funded by the jwH Foundation, will identify game locations and supply selected sites with the *Hello* game and training to support successful community game events. All qualifying locations will be geographically diverse. Selected locations must be able to commit to a minimum number of game participants and invite players from population groups traditionally underserved by the U.S. health care system.

Fifteen of the 50 qualified locations will be selected to participate in the research aspect of the project, which will involve a pre-game assessment, post-game questions and focus groups, and 3-month follow-up phone interviews to assess ACP behaviors that have been performed.

“The research we’ve done to date has demonstrated that *Hello* is a well-received, enjoyable and effective way to engage people in these challenging conversations,” said Dr. Van Scoy. “The funding from the jwH foundation will allow us to broaden our studies to a national audience with a focus on African American communities, where the need for high quality advance care planning is even more critical.”

Upon completion of the project, this collaboration is expected to have reached up to 1,000 African American individuals and 1,500 additional individuals from other underrepresented communities, providing them with an enjoyable and enriching experience that facilitates the communication about end-of-life issues, ultimately improving the quality of their end-of-life care.

For information about how to be part of the project, contact Amy Tucci or Cindy Bramble of HFA at 202-457-5811, or at Helloproject@hospicefoundation.org.

For information about the *Hello* game, visit <https://commonpractice.com/hello>.