

# SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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## STUDENTS HELP DEVELOP PROGRAM AIMED AT EDUCATING HISPANICS ABOUT DRUNKEN-DRIVING RISKS

DALLAS — July 18, 1997 — While awareness of drunken driving risks has increased dramatically among the general population during the past decade, studies indicate that many important anti-DWI messages have failed to reach Spanish-speaking members of the community. Perhaps as a result, alcohol-related automobile crashes reportedly have increased among Hispanics while rates among other ethnic groups have fallen.

A group of physician assistant students at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas is implementing a new program aimed at bridging the language gap that exists in public education campaigns. The students developed a slide presentation in Spanish that includes data that relates specifically to the Hispanic community as part of a program that is designed to make an impact on drivers who may not realize the damage done by drunken driving.

In Dallas County, DWI offenders are required to participate in a Victim Impact Panel as part of their sentence. The program, administered by Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) metroplex chapter, includes speakers whose lives have been adversely affected by drunken drivers, as well as educational information about alcohol abuse.

Students Angel Ribo, Brita Davidson, Chuck Gravely, Kevin Wilson and Troy Houston, worked on the new program. Ribo, Davidson and Gravely now are attempting to gain additional funding to enable them to share their presentation throughout the country. They also are developing a method for tracking recidivism among participants in the program.

The students — a year away from graduation from Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School, which is part of UT Southwestern — also are looking forward to finding new ways to reach communities underserved by current drunken-driving education programs.

Ribo said the project grew out of a class assignment focused on health-promotion

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programs. "I was amazed to find out that no program really existed to address drunken-driving problems specifically in the Hispanic community," he said.

In contrast to national trends, the number of Hispanics involved in drunken-driving collisions has increased, Ribo said. Among other minority populations, this fact also stands out. During the period of 1992-94, alcohol-related fatalities of African-American males decreased by 27 percent in Dallas, while comparable rates for Hispanic males rose by 33 percent, Ribo said.

In Dallas County, where Hispanics make up 20 percent of the population, Hispanic males were twice as likely as non-Hispanic white males or African-American males to be injured or killed in an alcohol-related car crash in 1994.

Besides translating the slide show into Spanish, the students gathered statistics that pointed out how drunken driving impacts the Hispanic community. "We feel like we can get the message across better to participants if we focus on how their own community and families are affected by this problem," Ribo said.

For example, he said, the presentation points out that a disproportionate number of Hispanic children are killed as pedestrian victims of drunken-driving accidents. "This brings home the idea that you may hurt one of your own children or one of your neighbor's children if you drink and drive," Ribo said.

Ribo said it is vital for people to realize that a problem exists before they can start reducing its effects. While conducting their research, the students combed the pages of local Spanish-language newspapers but found no mention of drunken-driving crashes in the community. "The editors told us that they don't print bad news," Ribo said. "Well, we think people need to hear about the bad things that can happen, so they don't keep happening."

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