Help Desk: A Student-Led Initiative to Address Social Determinants of Health in Durham, N.C.

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Overview

The social determinants of health account for 40% of health outcomes. Most health systems, however, are not fully integrated with community and social services to manage patients’ social needs. Student volunteers, eager for meaningful clinical experiences, are an untapped resource that health systems can better leverage to improve integrated patient care.

Our team partnered with Lincoln Community Health Center to implement a student “Help Desk” to help address social barriers patients face like food insecurity, access to medical care, financial instability, and transportation. Given its high prevalence in the Lincoln patient population, we are focusing on food insecurity this semester. Our Help Desk team consists of three taskforces: health service delivery, quality improvement and evaluation, and health policy and community engagement.

Health Service Delivery

- Lincoln case managers screen patients for unmet social needs
- Volunteer make follow-up calls to connect patients with resources
- Lincoln case managers refer patients to community resources

We trained student volunteers to become community resource navigators to conduct follow-up calls with patients. Volunteers assess success of connections with community-based resources, provide information to patients to troubleshoot reported barriers, and motive follow-through.

Logic Model

**Inputs**
- Help Desk student team
- Lincoln Behavioral Health Team
- Duke Center for Personalized Health Care
- Grant funding, Physical resources

**Activities**
- Recruit and train student volunteers
- Build REDCap Database
- Volunteers conduct follow-up calls and outcome assessments with patients
- Volunteers manage local community resource directory

**Outputs**
- # of volunteers recruited, trained, and retained
- # of patients called & who answered at 2/4 week follow ups
- # of patients who previously used community resources
- # of services initiated after a follow-up call

**Short Term Outcomes**
- Improve patients’ understanding of referral & services; improve patients’ self-efficacy with using community resources
- Improve volunteers’ understanding of social determinants & Durham resources; improve motivational interviewing skills

**Medium Term Outcomes**
- Increased use of community-based resources
- Students improve pre-professional core competencies with meaningful volunteer experiences (defined by AAMC)

**Long Term Outcomes**
- Improved patient health outcomes
- Students are better prepared as contributing members of the public health system

Help Desk Taskforces 2019-2020

Health Service Delivery

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Quality Improvement & Evaluation

We are creating data-driven reports that will inform improvement of the Help Desk program. We will divide our general analysis into the following sections: 1. Demographics and Social Determinants of Health, 2. Referral Quality, and 3. Call Outcomes.

**Help Desk Data Project Flow**

- **Data Cleaning:** What variables are most relevant?
- **Data Visualization:** How can we best see and understand trends?
- **Recommendations:** How does our data inform future care?

**Examples:**

- In the past year have you or any family members you live with been unable to get any of the following when it was really needed?

Health Policy & Community Engagement

To best serve Lincoln patients and inform future policy, we are conducting a social network analysis to determine the strength and span of Durham’s food insecurity resources.

- Build and categorize food resources directory based on existing resources and online research
- Conduct interviews with organization leaders on collaboration and partnerships
- Share findings with Lincoln leadership to improve breadth and efficacy of referrals
- Create social network analysis depicting network connectedness
- Share findings with health and social policy leaders to inform future social needs referral policy
- Repeat process for housing and transportation organizations

Acknowledgements: Carolyn Crowder, Howard Eisenson; Lincoln Community Health Center; Duke University Bass Connections Program; Duke Global Health Institute