

THE HEALTH CONTINUUM: Making a Difference

By: Cascillas Guy

MD Candidate 2016, Morehouse School of Medicine

Introduction

In the United States, Americans suffer from a variety of medical conditions for numerous reasons. These medical conditions send them to their local hospital's emergency department quite often. Frequent utilization of these services tend to become very expensive for hospitals. What is worse is the fact that many of the patients' medical issues seen by emergency department health workers are not really emergencies at all. Also some of the patient ailments are a result of complications from their medical conditions. These complications could have been prevented had the patients seen a primary care provider. This type of behavior has caused a few questions to be raised over the past years. What are these medical issues that continue to plague patients and consequently the emergency department? Can these issues be prevented or at the very least their complications lessened? Why is it that a patient's first response to health problems is the emergency department? Whatever the answer to these questions, one thing is clear. Something must be done.

One solution is to look at preventive measures particularly in the underserved, economically disadvantaged, and elderly populations. These maybe key areas in preventing unnecessary emergency department visits. Underserved and disadvantaged

populations are important because they struggle to overcome barriers of access to proper medical care. Barriers range from knowledge of medical conditions to transportation to medical facilities. Persons of this category go to emergency departments because they do not know where else to turn for their condition or they wait until their condition is sufficiently severe because of transportation concerns. The elderly are of particular interest because they suffer lots of complications associated with their health conditions. These complications return them to the hospital or emergency department more often than they should. Perhaps a new strategy/intervention should be implemented or a combination of existing strategies to reach these targeted populations.

The purpose of this paper is to describe processes taken to develop a project in Mesa, Arizona to target the aforementioned issues. The overall objective of the project was to assist in the collaboration of Adelante Healthcare, with other nonprofit organizations such as The Harp Foundation and Mathew's Crossing Food Bank ultimately to apply for a grant offered by Dignity Health in the hope of meeting the community health needs of two of its hospitals. The project is entitled The Health Continuum.

Background

Dignity Health, formerly known as Catholic Healthcare West, is a for-profit health organization that was founded in 1986. They are the fifth largest hospital provider in the U.S. and the largest hospital system in California. They deliver care throughout seventeen states. Their mission is 1.) Delivering compassionate high quality, affordable health services, 2.) Serving and advocating for our sisters and brothers who are poor

and disenfranchised, and 3.) Partnering with others in the community to improve the quality of life. Every year Dignity health offers a Community Grant to non-profit organizations that collaboratively responds to the health assessments of its hospitals. This grant is to be used solely to provide services to underserved populations. In order to apply for the grant there must be a minimum of three 501 c nonprofit organizations working together. The proposed project must be in response to health concerns identified by Dignity. The community Grant Program places strong emphasis on projects who have objectives such as emphasizing primary prevention and addressing underlying causes of health problems. The grant offers up to \$100,000.00, divided amongst all participating organizations, to fund the pilot project. No single organization will receive greater than \$75,000.00 for the project. Also before a grant proposal is written, a letter of Intent must first be submitted. The Letter of Intent will be used to determine if Dignity wants to see a grant proposal for that particular project. Each organization involved is required to submit a Letter of Intent stating the role it plays within the project. There are however a few questions that must be the same for every organization. What is the mission statement of the collaboration? Who are the community partners? What is the target population and location of project? What are the goals of the project? How will data be collected and evaluated? What is the total amount requested from Dignity Health's Community Grant Program? The Letter of Intent is due on July 5, 2013 and applicants will be informed of its status on August 5, 2013.

Methodology

Project planning: In order to plan for and work out logistics to meet the needs of

the selected community identified by Dignity Health's associated hospitals, several meetings were conducted among Adelante Healthcare, The Harp Foundation, and Mathew's Crossing Food Bank. Within the meetings the following things were discussed: 1.) Location and target population, 2.) Mission and Goals of collaborative efforts, 3.) Letter of Intent, 4.) Budget for the project, and 5.) Collection and evaluation of data.

Proposed Project Implementation: A total of twenty-four health education and family events will be held for the duration of the grant (January 2014 - December 2014). Three major family events will be held on the second Saturday of April, August, and October with an already established format at Adelante. These events will consist of a health fair atmosphere with bounce houses, face painters, food provided by Mathew's Crossing Food Bank, music from The Harp Foundation, and exhibitors to provide community resources. In the remaining nine months smaller family events will be held on the second Saturdays with a specific focus like water safety and activities. Finally a Lunch and Learn series will be held once a month in the middle of the week that will have various topics impacting children, seniors, and families. The partnership with the for-profit organization, Clean Air Cab, will enable participants and patients within a twenty mile radius to receive free cab rides to the events and to any primary healthcare appointments. At each of these events pre and post-tests along with surveys will be given to participants to evaluate the program's effectiveness.

Results

Community Partners: To apply for the grant three nonprofit organizations had to partner together. The following community partners were chosen because they had

similar missions and were willing to cooperate with one another.

Adelante Healthcare is a community health center that was established over thirty years ago as a migrant farm clinic. Since that time they have expanded to include all individuals in need of healthcare. The mission of Adelante is "to improve the health of our communities by providing the highest level of primary and preventive care, making it affordable for everyone and operating in an affordable manor." Their community health centers provide a wide range of services such as family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, women's health, dental, lab work, pharmacy, and a WIC nutritional program. This is a key piece of the project as Adelante Healthcare would be providing medically relevant knowledge and relatively inexpensive quality care to underserved and economically disadvantaged individuals. Through their comprehensive services Adelante can show patients, especially the elderly, how to manage chronic illnesses and therefore decrease the appearance of complications associated with mismanagement. The Pediatric program allows them to change the mindset of parents and children about first response habits to none serious medical concerns.

The food a person eats has a significant effect on his or her health. Although genetics plays a part, some diseases have been shown to be linked to one's diet. They are diseases like obesity, diabetes, and hypertension to name a few. Although preventable, diseases such as these continue to plague communities. With the help of Mathew's Crossing Food Bank this project can target the diets of community members. In 2005 Mathew's Crossing Food Bank was established out of a need seen by Saint Mathew's Episcopal Church. Their mission is "uniting our community in the fight

against hunger by providing food and basic necessities to our neighbors in need ." Within the scope of the Health Continuum Project they will be providing healthy food to individuals who participate in the program. This is significant since low-income neighborhoods are known to have more fast food restaurants and corner stores that grocery stores which makes it a great task for people to find affordable healthy food (Treuhaft and Karpyn, 2010). Mathew's Crossing will also be providing healthy recipes on the backs of its bags for families to cook.

Lastly, The Harp Foundation was the other non-profit organization chosen for the Health Continuum. Founded in May of 2000, their mission is to provide therapeutic harp music for the comfort, well-being, and healing of families and special needs patients (Gillen, Biley, & Allen, 2008). They also offer support for the underserved. Within this project they would be responsible for providing entertaining music at all functions hosted by the Health continuum. They will provide a Harpist to play in Adelante's health clinic which in the pediatric department has the potential to keep children occupied freeing parents to talk to the physicians (Kemper & McLean, 2008). Through the Harp Foundation compact discs containing harp music will be provided at discounted rates to at least three hundred families.

Mission statement: According to the Letter of Intent specified by Dignity Health the project has to have a mission statement. After some dialogue, the mission statement that was agreed upon by all three non-profit organizations declares the following: Using a holistic method of approach Adelante Healthcare, Mathew's Crossing Food Bank, and The Harp Foundation will become a centralized community resource hub with focus on shifting first response habits from emergency departments to a

primary care provider. The organizations felt this was appropriate because they want the community health center in Mesa, Arizona to be seen by the community as more than a clinic, but a place where a wide variety of information is provided. Because the Health Continuum is designed to meet more than just the immediate concerns of patients but focus on other issues such as diet and therapeutic music, the word "holistic" seemed appropriate.

Target population: The service area chosen for this particular project is located in Dignity Health's East Valley service area. This area is covered by two of Dignity's hospitals. They are Mercy-Gilbert Medical Center and Chandler Regional Medical Center. Through the community needs assessments conducted by the hospitals, a list of seven needs were chosen to be focused upon between the years 2013 and 2015. From that list the Health Continuum hopes to address three of the health needs. They are 1.) Chronic disease: which encompasses disease management, reduction in hospital admission, and reduction in readmission, 2.) Access to medical primary and secondary prevention, health education, intervention, and treatment, and 3.) Obesity. Within the East Valley service area the target population will be the underserved, insured and uninsured elderly, and families with children whose: first response to health care is 911 or going to the emergency department; Lack of follow-up care often returns them to their original hospitals within thirty days; self esteem is so low their hopes and dreams for a better life are depressed; and culture or life experiences put them at risk for behavior health issues, obesity, or chronic disease.

Goals: The Health Continuum will initially have six main goals. 1.) Raise awareness of primary healthcare services and resources available to the community.

2.) Reduce 911 calls and emergency department visits as first response to primary healthcare. 3.) Reduce thirty day hospital return visits. 4.) Reduce stress, initiate healing, and create a paradigm shift in patients approach to wellness. 5.) Provide all aspects of access to care through a seamless continuum of services. 6.) Reduce obesity and increase responsible management of chronic disease.

Budget: An itemized budget was created for Adelante and The Harp Foundation (see Table 1 and 2 of the Appendix). Mathew's Crossing Food Bank budget was based on operational costs. A subtotal for each organization was then calculated. Adelante requires \$42,722.00, The Harp Foundation \$27,364.00, and Mathew's Crossing Food Bank requires \$27,000.00. This equates to a grand total of \$96,804.00 that will be requested from Dignity Health to fund the pilot project.

Discussion

The purpose of the proposed Health Continuum is to attenuate, if not alleviate, the health needs of the communities identified by Mercy-Gilbert Medical Center and Chandler Regional Medical Center. If that is to be the outcome then there must be a way to collect and analyze data based on the goals that were established. It was determined that pretests and post-tests can be given to participants before and after educational classes to assess the knowledge acquired and effectiveness of the classes. Surveys will be used to determine how the participants heard of the events and to see if awareness of healthcare services and resources is really being increased. Adelante's Mesa Health Center will look to see if it saw a volume increase as a result of the initiation of the Health Continuum. To measure ED deference the average yearly emergency visits will need to be obtained from the hospitals. Once The Health

Continuum has been implemented, ED visit data will be compared to that of the previous year. From this it can be determined if the program is having an impact. Again qualitative surveys in the form of questionnaires will be utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of harp music on participants' stress levels. It will contain questions asking participants to rate their level of stress before and after the scheduled events and programs. Similar surveys containing questions such as "When is it appropriate to visit the emergency department?" will be used to measure participants' approach to wellness. Also some patients will be followed through the system, similar to a primary care medical home model, to see what services and resources the patients receive. This approach allows for data to be collected reflecting how patients are managing their chronic illnesses. The Clean Air Cab organization will keep track of those utilizing their services to get to events held by the Health Continuum. This allows the project to monitor transportation issues, another aspect of health that many patients consider to be a barrier.

Recommendations

The Health Continuum project will be very beneficial to Mesa, Arizona. Therefore it should not be wholly dependent on grant money from Dignity Health which may or may not get approved. The leaders of these non-profit organizations need to apply for other grants as well to help fund the program. Other non-profit, and even for-profit, organizations will need to be incorporated to help lower the costs and to make it sustainable. In terms of data collection and analysis, someone should be put in charge of closely communicating with the hospitals' emergency departments. Their contact information will be made available to the emergency department so it can be given to

patients who come to the ED for health problems that are not necessarily emergencies. The contact person will be in charge of making sure that the patient was assisted through the Health Continuum. This then provides a more accurate way of determining how many people were deferred from the emergency department through the program and collecting more accurate data has a greater chance of getting funded.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Health Continuum has great potential to meet the needs of the communities it is intended to serve. Located in Mesa, Arizona this program has tried to address the issues raised by Dignity Health using an approach that affects various aspects of a person's life. In order to receive funding a Letter of Intent was written and submitted to Dignity Health on July 3, 2013. The status of the letter will be known on August 5, 2013. If approved, a formal grant proposal will need to be submitted by August 22, 2013. Finally if this grant proposal is accepted then the Health Continuum can receive funding to begin operating for the entirety of 2014.

References

- Gillen, E., Biley, F., & Allen, D. (2008). Effects of music listening on adult patients' pre-procedural state anxiety in hospital. *International Journal of Evidence-Based Healthcare* , 24-49.
- Kemper, K. J., & McLean, T. W. (2008). Parents' Attitudes and Expectations about Music's Impact on Pédiatrie Oncology Patients. *Journal of the Society of Intergrative Oncology* , 6, 146-149.
- Treuhart, S., & Karpyn, A. (2010). The grocery gap: Who has access to healthy food and why it matters. PolicyLink and The Food Trust. Retrieved November 23, 2012 from <http://www.policylink.org/atf/cf%7B97C6D565-BB43-406D-A6D5-ECA3BBF35AF0%7D/FINALGROCERYGAP.pdf>

Appendix

Table1: shows a tentative itemized budget for Adelante Healthcare

Adelante Sample Budget			
Category	Project amounts	Committed from other sources	Amount of Request to Dignity Health
Health and wellness Ed.			
3 large family events	11,100		11,100
9 smaller family events	9,000		9,000
12 lunch and learn	6,000		6,000
Transportation			
Cab vouchers	10,000	Need	10,000
Equipment			
Sound system	5,000	25,000	5,000
Consultant/contracted services			
website	1,340		1,340
Total			42,440

Table 2: Shows the itemized tentative budget for The Harp Foundation

The Harp Foundation Sample Budget		
Category	Amount	
Harp music for 12 classes	780	
Harp music for 12 events	1440	
Harpist in clinic	9500	
CD's for 300 families	750	
Development of phone app	1,500	
Operations for THF	4,394	
Resource Book Design	1,000	
Navigator	8,000	
Total		27,364