

Impact of Transportation on Health Outcomes

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Introduction

- As a native of the east coast I am well familiar with the benefits of an expansive public transportation system. On using the buses in Arizona for the first time I found myself frustrated with the restrictions imposed on my travel by the limited bus routes.
- I empathized with the patients who depended on public transport and whose mobility was limited by it. I came to believe that the Adelante Healthcare Centers would not be able to meet full patient potential due to a lack of access by these patients. Ironically, it is often these patients who are limited by their lack of access to transportation who need care the most.
- I hope that my project will help bring to light the issue of transportation, its role among patient populations and, as a result, help improve health outcomes within the patient population at Adelante Healthcare.



Background

- Positive health outcomes are arguably the most reliable measure of success and progression towards the goal of improved patient health.
- The effects of adequate access to transportation on health outcomes are often overlooked. One of the major implications of inadequate access to healthcare can be missed visits to the physician. By missing a visit a patient loses the opportunity to receive treatment for a condition, or prescription for a medication that could make a great difference.

Methodology

- A needs assessment was implemented via a brief five question multiple choice survey that was conducted by hand. Adelante Healthcare clients were asked to answer questions surrounding their ability to reach the healthcare center locations as well as their satisfaction with the taxi services provided by AHCCCS.
- Phoenix, Avondale, and Surprise locations were targeted.
- The survey was conducted over the period of 2 weeks. The use of translators was implemented as needed. Adults accompanying pediatric patients were asked to fill the survey on the behalf of the child they accompanied.
- Uber, Lyft, and Comtrans were contacted regarding possible transportation alternatives for patients. These services were contacted due to their familiarity and credibility among members of the community.
- The possibility of a future bus route through the future site in Peoria was explored by contacting Valley Metro, the company in control of the buses running through the Phoenix Metropolitan area, via phone and email.



Results

- A personal car was the most utilized means of transportation by far at each of the sites (75% Surprise 80% Avondale 65% Phoenix). Getting a ride from someone was the second most popular option at Surprise (17%) and Avondale (20%). However, at the Phoenix site, public transportation was the 2nd most utilized means of transportation after use of a personal car (18%).
- At Phoenix, the majority of patients (84%) surveyed cited that problems with transportation were the primary reason for missing an appointment.
- Despite the majority of the patients at each site reporting reliable means of transportation to their doctor's visits, most patients at each of the sites also stated that they would take a taxi if it was convenient (Surprise 77%, Avondale 58%, Phoenix 83%).
- On contacting Comtrans, the possibility of establishing a contract for patient transport was established. Further negotiation would be required to contract Comtrans for patient utilization at Adelante Healthcare.

Discussion

- A frequent complaint that surfaced while conducting the survey was the issue of women not being able to take their children with them in the taxi. Several patients complained that it was impossible for them to leave their child because there was no one to watch the child and cited instances of being turned away from taxi drivers when they presented to the taxi with their child. A change in this policy might make it easier for OB/GYN patients to schedule appointments.
- The highest number of surveys was collected from Phoenix. Likewise the use of translators was most heavily utilized at the Phoenix site. The assumption can be made then that of the three sites the data points captured from the phoenix site is most representative of the potential patient population. At the Phoenix the majority of patients cited not having a reliable source of transportation despite access to public transportation.
- Overall, it was shocking to uncover the number of patients who were not aware that the AHCCCS taxi cabs were a service that was available to patients. The system might be a remedy to many of the patients at the Phoenix site, if not patients at all the sites, who recognize difficulty getting to their appointment due to transportation.

Recommendations

- A primary recommendation is expansion of the survey. In addition, to a survey of the general patient population, I would also like to have stratified the survey to examine exclusively:
 - (1) patients who missed visits and whether lack of access to transportation is a major cause of missed visits within that specific subset of patients.
 - (2) patients within a 5-10 mile radius of the new site in Peoria to see if transport to the new site will be an issue for patients considering that site does not have access to public transportation.
- Further, I would have liked to distribute the survey to far more patients to get a more accurate collection of data points from the patient population.

Conclusion

- Transportation in Arizona is in the developing stages. However, the system still leaves a great deal to be desired in terms of allowing people to access different sites in Arizona. Until access better access to transportation is established it is possible that the sites will never reach their full potential.
- Lack of public transportation continues to pose issues for to the patient population in Surprise and the chances that those same issues will be mirrored in the new site in Peoria may become a stark reality.
- In many cases transportation can pose as an indirect obstacle to obtaining timely access to care. It is my strong belief that by improving access to transportation, sites like Adelante Healthcare will not only improve patient health but also aid in sustaining positive patient health outcomes.

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