

Barriers in Healthcare Access

Possible Solutions for North Shore Communities

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INTRODUCTION

- North Shore Community Health Center (NSCH) is a nonprofit organization with clinic locations in Gloucester, Peabody, Salem, along with a telehealth program as the clinics are by appointment only. Currently NSCH serves seven school-based locations within their communities as well (Wpengine, 2022).
- The values North Shore Community Health Center expresses are accountability, commitment, courage, empathy, integrity, and respect which all help drive their mission of building healthy communities through providing exceptional care to all people (Wpengine, 2022).
- Family medicine, women's health services, chronic disease management, LGBT services, behavioral health, dental, addiction treatment, HIV and Hep C treatment, laboratory, pharmacy, homeless care coordination, insurance enrollment assistance, as well as housing and food insecurity support are all services that NSCH provide to their patients regardless of their insurance status or ability to pay ((Wpengine, 2022).

RELATED LITERATURE

- Different medical tools and instruments have been developed since the early 1990's to effectively diagnose the early stages of the most common types of mental disorders presented across medical populations. These questionnaires were filled out by the patient then used by a medical professional to target the main five mental disorders of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, alcohol, and somatoform (Instruction manual instructions for patient health ...)
- 'The PHQ-9 Validity of a Brief Depression Screening Severity' was a study done with a sample of 6,000 patients overall with criterion validity access done on an independent sample of 580 patients. The study concluded that the PHQ-9 is an effective and reliable diagnostic tool as well as a research tool because of the characteristics within the questionnaire along with how brief it is for the patient to complete. (Kroenke et al., 2001)
- In coordination with screening patients for different mental disorders NSCH also ingrains a screening for Social Determinants of Health (SDOH). The SODH that a patient may be struggling with can seriously affect how a patient addresses their mental and physical health as well as the barriers they face in gaining access to medical care. NSCH has the connections and resources needed to help build a bridge in order to close the gap in access for their patients. NSCH has made SODH screenings a valuable process in their facilities to connect their patients "with referrals to community-based resources, comprehensive across all patient populations, and focused on leveraging the strengths of patients, families, and communities" (O'Gurek & Henke, 2018)

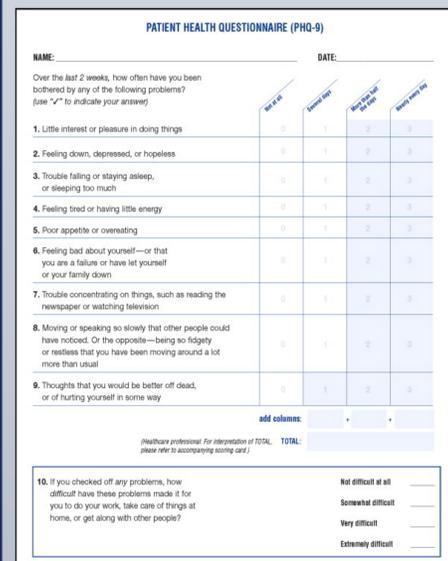
OBJECTIVES

- Addressing various barriers to access within the healthcare field specifically with the PHQ and SDOH screenings. Barriers such as language/culture, health literacy, hours of operation, and staff comfortability with the screenings.
- This project hoped to help discover possible solutions to these barriers (such as translation/interpreter services, flexible hours of operation, more staff trainings on the screening tools, etc.).

METHODS AND MATERIALS

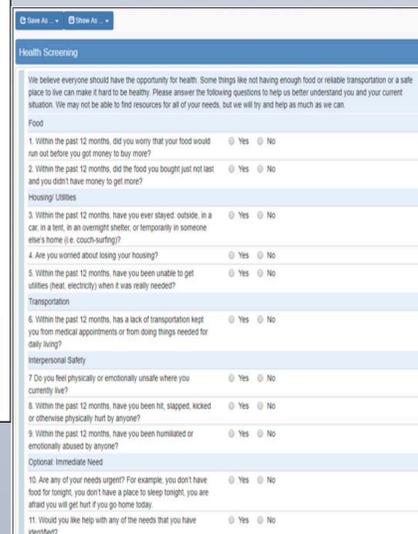
- Viewed HIPPA training videos and completed required quizzes to reinforce the information, reviewed overview of the screenings and accompanying script for phone call interaction with patient
- Called existing patients of North Shore Community Health Center, who have not been into the health center since the onset of covid-19. During these calls, patients were asked to participate in routine screenings via the telephone
- Created a Microsoft document with screening questions and multiple-choice questions to read to the patient. Upon receiving their consent to participate in the screening, we asked them these questions and recorded their responses
- Having the answers imported into the spreadsheet allowed for easy reference and data collection regarding how the patients felt about taking these screenings via the phone and how likely they were to continue with telehealth.

DEPRESSION SCREENING: PATIENT QUESTIONNAIRE



MAYO CLINIC

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH SCREENING: PATIENT QUESTIONNAIRE



NIH NLM

RESULTS

- One of the goals of this internship experience was to complete as many screenings as possible. At the end of April 2022, we have completed just over 100 screenings
- Barriers to attaining the care needed in the healthcare industry have been highlighted exponentially. One of the most common barriers experienced throughout this internship experience was the language barrier. While North Shore Community Health Center has a phone call interpreter service, there are always ways to improve.
- Appointing or hiring employees to specifically support the patients' health literacy, offering speech-to-text options through software such as Dragon Medical One for visually impaired or auditory learners.
- Expanding the on-site hours by either adding a second shift or appointing certain days for employees to work later ensures access to individuals who cannot come during regular business hours.
- Selecting or hiring one employee to be the director of operations for patient outreach regarding the screenings will allow them to be completed more effectively. The director of operations would also oversee decision-making, schedule meetings, answer questions, and provide training materials for new/existing employees.

CONCLUSIONS

- Healthcare and overall access to it has changed a lot within the last few years. North Shore Community Health upholds its values through its support to its patients by providing exceptional healthcare to all. With this finished project, I hoped to shed some light on the existing healthcare access barriers on the north shore and pave the way for real positive changes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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