Referral System at Family Health Center of Worcester

Dr. Lisa Carter, Dr. Melanie Gnazzo, Kathleen Kasper, Kevin O'Day, Elizabeth Ojukwu, Jackie Raymond, Sonja Schaffer, Aida Shkreta, Gianna Wilkie

Population Health Clerkship: Worcester’s Faces and Places

Background

- Family Health Center of Worcester (FHCW) serves over 30,000 individuals.
- Ethnicities of patients at FHCW:
  - White Hispanic and non-Hispanic: 60%
  - African American and African-born: 26%
  - Asian/Pacific Islander decent: 14%
- Almost half of the patients speak a primary language other than English
- 99% of the patients have income levels below 200% of poverty
- Insurance: 51% on Medicaid; 8% on Medicare; 23% uninsured

Objectives

- To assess current referral system at the FHCW
- To implement changes in referral system
- To improve patient attendance at specialist appointments
- Communication barriers in the current referral system
- Patient communication preferences in setting up referrals

Methods

- Conducting Face to Face Interviews
- Identify patients who had referrals in the last 5 months
- Assess patient experience with current referral system
- Data Analysis: Survey Monkey was used to organize and analyze all collected data.

Results

**Total Survey Population**
- Sample size (n=39)

**Difficulty Understanding Instructions (Subgroup)**
- Sample size (n=8)

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<tr>
<th>Easiness of Reading in English</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can Read English Well</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can Read Some English</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cannot Read in English</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
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<td>Other (deaf, comprehension problem)</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
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<th>Easiness of Reading in English</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Can Read English Well</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can Read Some English</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cannot Read in English</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<th>Primary Language</th>
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- English (35.9%)
- Spanish (51.3%)
- Arabic (2.6%)
- Portuguese (2.6%)
- Twi (2.6%)

**Communication Preference**

- How do you prefer to schedule a specialist appointment or special test?
  - Have your primary doctor's office make the appointment
  - Get a call from the specialist's office
  - Get the number for the specialist office and call yourself

- Did you go to the appointment?
  - Yes: 75.0%
  - No: 23.5%

- Were the instruction about the referral appointment easy to follow?
  - Yes: 75.0%
  - No: 25.0%

Conclusions

Patients who had difficulty understanding instructions were more likely:
- Spanish speaking (87.5 vs. 51%)
- To prefer to receive the number of the specialist and call themselves (42.9% vs. 32.4%)

Significantly, the no show rate more than doubled (50.0% vs. 23.5%) in this subgroup.

**Limitations**
- Small sample size (n= 39)
- Confounds of population: language, literacy
- Inconsistent data collection
- Team/staff approach
- Unclear wording of questions
- Lack of verifiability of results (attendance confirmation)

**Recommended Changes to Referral System**
- Patient should be notified by letter and phone.
- Patient should be notified of referral in their language of choice as well as English.
- Letters should be typed instead of handwritten.

**Future Research**
- Gather information from staff point of view
- Gather feedback from specialist office

**References**


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