Population Health Clerkship 2018
Parenting and Family Stability
Pernet Family Health Services

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Population of Focus: Key Demographics

- Pernet Serves: **9,200 clients** each year in all programs, focussed mainly on the **Green Island area** (01610)
- Many refugees live in this neighborhood:
  - Common countries of origin: **Southeast Asia, Albania, Brazil, West Indies, the Mideast and Africa**.
- Approximately **38% are White, 36% are Hispanic, 13 % are African American or African, 4% are Southeast Asian** and the rest are from Mideastern or Eastern European countries.
- Demographics derived from US census data and field research indicate a **severe level of poverty**, lack of formal **education**, high **unemployment**, inferior **housing**, and a dramatic **foreclosure** rate resulting in **family destabilization**
- There is no neighborhood school, no branch library, no community development corporation, no youth-serving agency or organization
Population of Focus: Risk exposures

Medical
- Substance use in the home and/or active addiction
- Parental chronic illness (mental or physical)
- Developmental disabilities
- Limited prenatal care
- Barriers in access to health care
- Smoking

Social:
- Lack of maternal education
- Lack of social support
- Lack of adequate food or clothing
- Housing instability
- Lack of accessible transportation
- Risk positive for child abuse/neglect, domestic violence
Interprofessional Teams of Care

Staff Members at Pernet:

- Non-profit Leadership Staff
- Emergency Assistance Coordinator
- Community Development Staff
- Maternal Child Health Nurse
- Parent Aide
- Early Intervention Service Coordinators including:
  - Early Intervention Social Workers
  - Early Intervention Developmental Specialist
  - Early Intervention Nurse
Maternal-Child Care Nurse

- **Qualifications:** RN
- **Scope of Practice:**
  - Provide maternal-child care support to new mothers
  - Check on moms for whom DCF has some concern
  - Report to DCF on any moms who appear to be showing neglect for their child
  - Provide basic medical care for the child, such as checking weight gains and trouble-shooting any problems (sleep issues, eating concerns, developmental questions)
- **How they provide care:** in-home appointments at the mother’s convenience
- **Strengths:** provides direct support for the mom and child in their home, provides someone who can check on the wellbeing of the child in the case of abuse or neglect
- **Limitations:** Small team
Early Intervention (Social Workers and Developmental Specialists)

- **Qualifications**: Masters in social work or special education with a focus on early childhood intervention

- **Scope of Practice:**
  - Provide assessments on a child’s cognitive, linguistic, and overall development
  - Provide therapy in three categories: occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and speech therapy
  - Playgroups provide a setting where kids have access to educational toys and can socialize with kids their age

- **How they provide care**: in-home assessment and therapy (weekly, biweekly, monthly options)

- **Strengths**: children are provided with early developmental support at no cost to the family, the family has full control over what services they would like

- **Limitations**: Only available until they are 3 years old, the family can deny help for their child even if the assessment shows large deficits
Parent Aide

- **Qualifications**: Bachelor's degree in social services or psychology, and/or experience in the field

- **Scope of Practice**:
  - Provide parents with a large variety of support depending on their specific situation
  - Supervised visits with separated children
  - Family-building activities like a halloween party for parents and children
  - Helping the parent build a support network or counseling, reconnect with separated children, help them with transportation and support for court hearings

- **How they provide care**: in-home visits and group sessions at Pernet

- **Strengths**: parents who have been referred to DCF for whatever issue that was identified in their home has someone who can help them overcome a large variety of challenges and improve family function

- **Limitations**: short time limit for aid makes long term follow-up difficult
How can providers interact with these professionals?

- When you refer a child or family to DCF, know what resources DCF will connect them with.
- When you have a patient who is in one of these programs, you can connect directly with these professionals providing them with in-home support if you have a particular question or concern.
- If you’re concerned about a child’s development, you can refer them to Early Intervention before the age of 3 to connect them with developmental specialists and therapy to tackle the problem early on.
- Patients with autism may benefit greatly from the Early Intervention program as well. Know who can diagnose a child with autism (Developmental Pediatricians) and how that qualifies them for further resources.
Mental Health Project

- Pernet found a need for better mental health services in their population through a survey they gave to existing clients.
- Pernet procured a grant (from UMASS and CHIP) to address this mental health disparity.
- Our role: to help plan, organize, and launch a new method of connecting their clients with mental health services:
  - Mental health survey to assess clients' needs.
  - Survey about desired services and programs to inform future Pernet mental health services.
  - Follow-up system to help track how well their program is working.
    - Follow-up forms to see how well the client's mental health needs are being addressed, any barriers to care, what types of programs worked well for them.
  - Addressing the mental health stigma.
  - Information hand-out for Pernet to distribute to clients about mental health in general and their new mental health programming.
Population Health Advocacy: Department of Children and Families

- **Major Area of Advocacy**: Protects children from abuse and neglect
  - Supports young adults, age 18-22, transitioning from DCF custody to independent living
- **To Whom are they Advocating**: Referrals to organizations such as Pernet Family Health Services for home health aid to parenting woman at risk for poor health outcomes
- **Successes**: Maintained relationships with organizations such as Pernet Family Health Services
  - Pernet’s service provides parenting support services for families under DCF supervision
  - DCF focuses on getting families to a safe point, so their families could be reunited
- **Challenges**: Families may have difficult time committing to home visits or attending helpful parenting workshops
  - DCF sends a referral for a family, but the family does not follow through with support
Population Health Advocacy: Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children of Worcester County

- **Major Area of Advocacy**: Speaking for the best interest of abused and neglected children in Worcester County Courts
  - Allow children to grow up in a safe home with a sense of hope and a future
  - Maintaining a safe home environment is important for good health and wellbeing
- **To Whom are they Advocating**: Gather and present information and make recommendations to a judge in the best interest of the child
- **Successes**: Advocates are assigned to one case at a time, so each case is taken as the number one priority
- **Challenges**: Once children turn age 18 they can emancipate from foster care and once they leave the system, they would lose their Advocate
  - Improvement: Development of Fostering Futures program geared to directly advocate for older youth age 14-21
Healthcare Providers as Advocates

- Pernet Family Health Services accepts referrals for many of their programs from health care providers at local hospitals
- Important as providers to be able to identify problems within a family when a child or parent is being taken care of in a health care setting
- Important to ask questions about social history as part of their medical history
- If any issues are identified, families should be referred to Department of Children and Families, so they could take appropriate measures to help the family
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