Introduction

- 1 in 5 adults, or over 53 million people, in the United States has a disability of some kind.
- Mobility disabilities are the most common, with a prevalence of 13% of US adults.
- Over 1/3 of adults over the age of 65 reported to have a disability, which is important given the aging population of the US.
- Individuals with lower income or education levels, and African American and Hispanic adults, are more likely to report a disability compared to higher SES and white adults.

Percentage of adults with select functional disability types

- 13.0% Mobility
- 10.6% Cognitive
- 6.5% Independent Living
- 4.6% Vision
- 3.6% Self-care

Service Learning Project

Target population: Young adults with a disability, aged 18-22, who are served by the Worcester Public School System

Location: WPS Transition Program, 24 Chatham St, Worcester

Goals:
- To prepare the students for success after high school, or the age of 22
- To teach key skills to help students live independently and to promote their overall wellness
- To help the medical and nursing students learn how to better communicate with patients with a variety of different disabilities

The project:
- Students prepared several small-group lessons and interactive games about the topics of doctor’s visits and healthcare. Lessons were designed to facilitate the young adult's skills to make sound decisions about their own health.
- The outcome: The students were actively engaged in the small groups, with nursing and medical students facilitating lesson discussion. Young adults were able to successfully demonstrate understanding of key lesson topics.

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Lessons Learned & Future Considerations

- Important to view each patient as a whole person and not overlook conditions unrelated to the disability.
- Assistive technology has changed the lives of people with disabilities and there are technologies to incorporate into every facet of life such as living, learning, working, and play.

Future Considerations:
- Allow for accessibility for all patients, including full-height adjustable exam tables,
- Access to interpreters and trained staff experienced in communicating with patients who are deaf or hard of hearing
- Incorporate assistive and adaptive technology in healthcare settings
- Ensuring accessibility to and providing information about outside organizations (i.e. Easter Seals) that will provide assistance to those with disabilities

Specific methods of ensuring access:
- Uniform sidewalks for those with wheelchairs or mobility restrictions
- ADA approved buildings and work areas with automatic doors
- Spacious elevators
- Braille on elevator numbers that are at eye-level
- Tables and counters accessible to wheelchairs
- Waiting areas with space available for wheelchairs
- Accessible, spacious bathrooms with eye-level handles

References