Assessing Barriers Among HIV, Substance Use Disorders, and Trans Patients During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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BACKGROUND

• COVID-19’s effects on the health of vulnerable populations (i.e. racial and ethnic minority groups) are still emerging; however, current data suggest a disproportionate burden of illness and death among groups with substance use disorders (SUD), HIV/AIDS and the transgender community.

• The widening of healthcare disparities in the setting of COVID-19, makes it important to explore the new implicit and explicit barriers faced by vulnerable populations in accessing healthcare during this time.

OBJECTIVES

• To explore socioeconomic barriers by surveying healthcare providers at Fenway Health about the impacts of COVID-19 on their patient’s healthcare access.

• To create avenues to mitigate barriers that widen the health disparities for vulnerable patients, especially in a public health crisis.

METHODOLOGY

• Cross-sectional pilot study

• Sample: Fenway Health Providers & Staff

• Measure: Barriers to healthcare access
  • Self-administered
  • Qualitative and quantitative questions

• Procedure: Survey links were sent via email

• Statistical analysis: Z-test, Fisher’s exact test

RESULTS

How many patients voiced an increase in mental health concerns?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>About 25%</th>
<th>About 50%</th>
<th>About 75%</th>
<th>All of the above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before COVID-19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During COVID-19</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P < 0.001

How many patients verbalized that access to the MBTA affected their ability to access appointments?

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<th>Group</th>
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<td>Before COVID-19</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During COVID-19</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P < 0.001

Significant correlation with frequency of outcomes reported when comparing “before” and “during” COVID-19 (p <0.001).

Barriers Among Patients at Fenway Health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier Type</th>
<th>Before COVID-19</th>
<th>During COVID-19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Insurance</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frequency of barrier types reported were significantly different (p < 0.001).

CONCLUSION

• It is evident that a lot of work needs to be done to facilitate efficient transportation, provide mental health services, and make appointments more convenient.

• Most providers identified a lack of education and understanding among their patients to access resources under the CARES Act.

• Financial barriers were the most common and language barriers were the least common.

RECOMMENDATIONS

• Appropriate educational tools that Fenway Health can use to educate their patients about the CARES Act. Educational materials such as brochures, pamphlets, and leaflets,

• Addition of CARES Act link to the patient portal

• Proposal to provide transportation vouchers to patients with no transportation

• Propose an increase in mental health screenings during COVID-19 & other public health crisis

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