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Transportation is a barrier to accessing primary care in Vermont

Max Silverstein, MS3, University of Vermont Larner College of Medicine

Family Medicine, February 2020

Preceptors: Drs. Calkins, Mariani, Reisman, Reiter

Distance and lack of transportation are major barriers to healthcare access

- ▶ Transportation barriers lead to rescheduled or missed appointments, delayed care, and missed or delayed medication use [1]
- ▶ Rural patients are especially vulnerable to transportation barriers: one study found that among 64 rural HIV patients, 31% lacked transportation and 37% missed appointments due to transportation problems [2]
- ▶ Another study showed that longer driving distances from one's physician are independently associated with less insulin use or poorer glycemic control [3]
- ▶ In Chittenden County specifically, older adults surveyed reported difficulty with transportation, with 69% delaying medical appointments due to transportation barriers [4]

Cost considerations

- ▶ In Chittenden County, Green Mountain Transit (GMT) contracts with Special Services Transportation Agency (SSTA) to provide both **ADA paratransit** and **Elderly and Disabled (E&D) trips** [5]
- ▶ Under the ADA, GMT provides ADA complementary paratransit where it provides fixed-route transit service to individuals who are certified as ADA paratransit eligible, based on a person not being able to access or use GMT's fixed-route service because of their disability or disabilities [5]
- ▶ GMT receives FTA 5310 grant funding from the State of Vermont Agency of Transportation's E&D program. Grant funds pay for 80% of the cost of rides for seniors (60+) and people with disabilities to travel within parameters established by GMT's partners, who match the 80% funding with 20% of their own resources [5]
- ▶ The E&D Transportation Program cost \$4.5 million in 2015; the average cost per trip was \$25 [6]
- ▶ Given these costs, it is vital that as many Vermont residents as possible are able to access primary care services

Community Perspective

- ▶ “In general, the SSTA is very effective at reaching those people in our community who have disabilities or qualify for Medicaid. There is a gap, however, for those people who have not qualified for disability coverage or Medicaid and live in the outer areas of our coverage where there is no city bus. Taxis are obviously very expensive and there is a lack of low-cost solutions for reaching these folks.”

Morgan Prouty, Customer Support Manager, SSTA

- ▶ “I don’t feel like the SSTA is always a great solution. I’m lucky in that I have my father who can help me get to appointments some times. But I have friends who miss appointments all the time because their ride is slow or late or unreliable. I think especially people who haven’t signed up for disability have a hard time getting rides.”

Amy S., Patient at South Burlington Family Medicine

Methodology

- ▶ Each patient at South Burlington Family Practice was offered a brief survey designed to assess the distance they travel to get to the doctor's office
- ▶ 73 patients completed surveys

Gender:

Male Female Other

Age:

18-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 56-65 66-75 75+

How do you typically get to the office for appointments?

Drive myself Someone drives me Public transportation Other (please describe)

About how many **miles** from the office do you live?

5 or less 5-10 10-15 15-20 20-30 30-60 60+

About how many **minutes** does it take you to get to our office?

5-10 10-15 15-30 30-45 45-60 60+

Have you ever **missed an appointment** because it was too far away or you did not have transportation to make it on time?

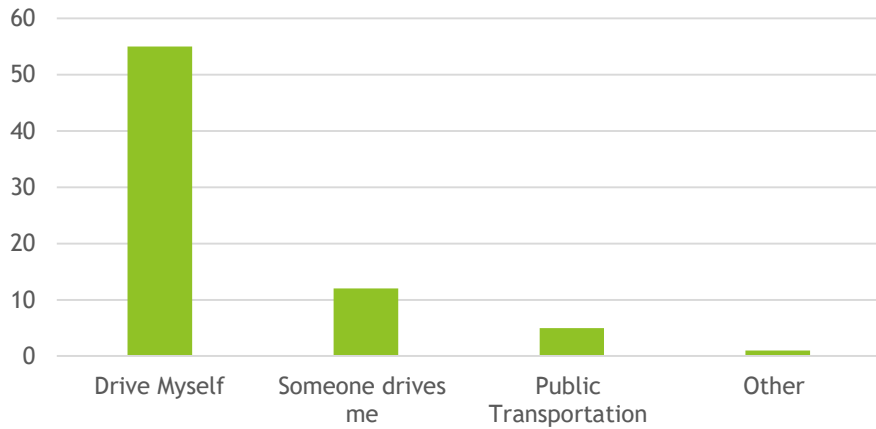
Yes No

Have you ever **declined an appointment** because it was too far away or would take too long to get there?

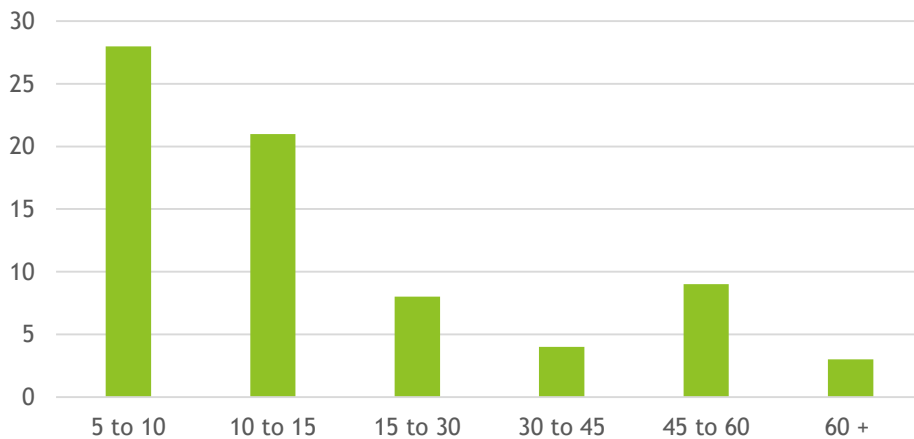
Yes No

Data and results

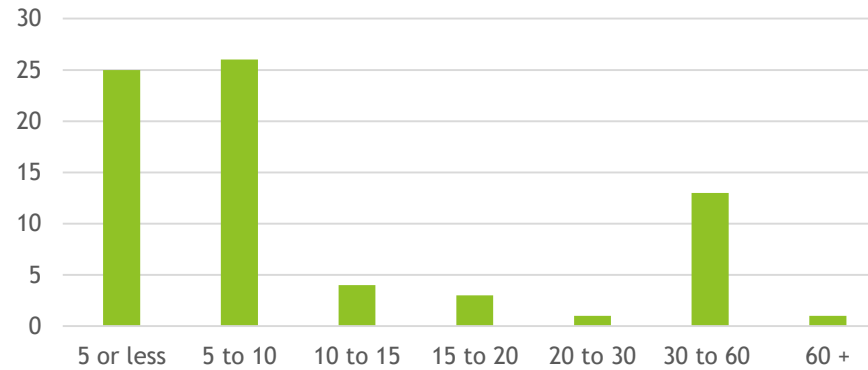
How do you typically get to the office?



How many minutes does it take to get to the office?



How many miles from the office do you live?



Have you ever **missed an appointment** because it was too far away or you did not have transportation? Yes 0, No 73

Have you ever **declined an appointment** because it was too far away or you did not have transportation? Yes 4, No 69

Evaluation and limitations

- ▶ The great majority of the patients at South Burlington Family Medicine drive themselves to appointments and live within 10 miles of the office
- ▶ However, 14/73 (19%) patients live 30+ miles from the office
- ▶ Only 4 patients (5%) reported declining an appointment due to distance or travel
 - ▶ All 4 of these patients lived 30+ miles from the office
- ▶ While this data is encouraging, the South Burlington office is centrally located and may not serve many of the patients living in more rural parts of the state who have the most difficulty attending appointments

Recommendations for future interventions

- ▶ Based on this data, even among patients at South Burlington Family Medicine, distance from the office is correlated with declining important medical appointments
- ▶ When a patient arrives very late or “no shows” for an appointment, providers should consider whether transportation was a barrier to attending
- ▶ Providers should ask patients at the next appointment following a “no show” whether finding transportation to the office is ever difficult for them
- ▶ If so, patients should be directed to resources, like the SSTA, that can assist in locating the reliable transportation to the office for appointments

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