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## Community Services for Patient Referral Document

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# COMMUNITY SERVICES FOR PATIENT REFERRAL DOCUMENT

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New Canaan Primary Care in New Canaan, CT

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January 2022

Project Mentor: Dr. Aesha Patel

# Problem

Patients have a need for referral to a variety of services that directly relate to their health and wellbeing that are not generally included in the traditional referral system of healthcare networks. These services include (but are not limited to) social work support, pandemic support, elderly services, LGBTQ+ services, intimate partner violence services, functional medicine, and substance use disorder and mental health support and treatment. Because these services are not part of the traditional healthcare referral system, healthcare providers may not have an up-to-date list of organizations and programs in the community that could provide these needed services. This is especially important in the current era when there has been increased turnover of healthcare workers at all levels leading to low institutional/community knowledge.

# Community Health Costs and Unique Considerations

## US Census summary of New Canaan, CT from July 1, 2021:

- Total population: 20,622
- Race: 86.3% white, 5.3% Latinx, 5.0% Asian, 2.2% two or more races, 1.6% black
- Median home value: \$1,355,800
- Bachelor's degree or higher (people >25 years old): 79.5%
- Median household income: \$190,227
- Persons in poverty: 3.2%

## 2020-2021 New Canaan, CT Health and Human Service spending and activities:

- Health and Human Services approved budget: \$478,176
- Other Human Services Agencies (including Meals on Wheels, Domestic Violence Crisis Center, and Community Program Mental Wellness) approved budget: \$140,000
- Department Performance indicators reported for 2019-2020:
  - 510 clients received case management and service coordinated from the department
  - 1,650 town food pantry participants

# Community Perspective

- The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a physical and mental toll on community members.
- Mental health and substance use are a special concern especially because access to therapists and psychiatrists is limited due to high demand and healthcare worker retirement/relocation.
- Elders make up a large portion of the community, yet many elders are isolated or struggling to find meaningful activities especially with the added strain of pandemic precautions.
- Specialized services such as those that support LGBTQ+ people, victims of intimate partner violence, and people who are uninsured or in poverty are important to members of the community.
- Many patients prefer to use alternative medicine alongside Western medicine to manage chronic conditions.

# Intervention and Methodology

## **Intervention:**

- Printed document for clinic staff reference that includes key organizations and services where patients seeking the follow types of services can be directed: social work/financial services, pandemic support, elderly support, LGBTQ+ services, intimate partner violence support, substance use disorder and mental health support and treatment, and functional medicine.

## **Methodology:**

- 2 formal interviews conducted, one with a physician at New Canaan Primary Care and one with a therapist within the community.
- Multiple informal conversations with patients where their personal health and wellbeing needs were explored. A running list of topics, services, and themes described by patients was kept throughout the 4 full weeks in clinic during the primary care clinical rotation.
- Online research exploring the services offered by the government of New Canaan, CT and nonprofits in the area.
- Based on the aggregate findings from information-gathering activities described above, the topics listed in the intervention were chosen based on community demand/relevance. The most relevant organizations were included in the referral document.

# Results

## Summary of findings:

- People in the community have a variety of needs that are directly related to their health but are not traditionally included within the healthcare referral system. These include social work/financial services, pandemic support, elderly support, LGBTQ+ services, intimate partner violence support, substance use disorder and mental health support and treatment, and functional medicine.
- There are many resources in the community that help address these patient needs.
- With increased turnover in healthcare, there are fewer staff in the New Canaan Family Practice who have worked in the area long enough to have developed a robust list of community resources to which they can refer their patients.

## Community Interviews:

- Dr. Aesha Patel, family medicine doctor in New Canaan, CT discussed the types of services patients often request when they come to her practice.
- Kathleen Cheslok, a therapist who serves the New Canaan community, discussed how most of her patients have anxiety and/or depression and the various resources they have requested or told her about during her sessions.

# Evaluation/Limitations

## **Evaluation**

- Referral document was reviewed by physician mentor and feedback incorporated.
- Future evaluation could include tracking the number of referrals made to each resource included on the referral document as well as a tally of other services commonly requested by patients not yet included on the community services patient referral document. Future evaluation could also include patient feedback on the helpfulness of referral resources.

## **Limitations**

- Due to the short duration of the clerkship, the referral document utility after implementation could not be evaluated during this family medicine rotation. Additional investigation into the needs of community members as well as how New Canaan residents' access resources in neighboring communities could further inform where residents prefer to access resources and if any key resource categories are missing from the current reference document.

# Recommendations for Future Projects

- A review of the programs and services listed in the community referral document developed as part of this project. This could include tallying the number of patients referred to each service as well as gathering the patient's perspective on their experience using the referral services.
- Community survey administered to patients of the New Canaan Family Practice clinic to more broadly explore community health concerns and needs.
- Exploration of patient preferences related to accessing healthcare services. New Canaan residents have access to multiple hospital networks because of their proximity to the Nuvance Health system; Stamford, CT; and New York, NY. Knowing how patients choose their providers, specialists, clinics, and hospitals and if they prefer to have all their healthcare needs addressed by one healthcare network or if they prefer to access different services in different networks might provide insight into how to better coordinate healthcare for New Canaan residents.

# References

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