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Brittany Gilmore

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The File of Life: A Lifeline for First Responders in Fairfield County, CT

Brittany Gilmore

Mentor: Maura Conway, DO

Rotation 6

The University of Vermont
LARNER COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

Problem Identification

- During a medical emergency, EMS might not be able to obtain important information such as medical history, medications, and allergies
  - Ex. if the patient is unconscious, has an altered mental status, is intoxicated, or has a dementia history
- The File of Life is great in theory, however it requires community members to know about the program, obtain a card, and have the relevant information available to be filled out
- Many fire and EMS services use File of Life, but report very few community members actually know about it and have one
  - They estimate 20% or fewer households in their area have a File of Life and of those, many are a few years old and out of date

Public Health Cost

- In the US, 41% of adults live with multiple chronic conditions
- When only considering adults aged 65 and older, 81% have multiple chronic conditions
- It can be extremely difficult for first responders to know what is happening with a patient who is unable to communicate their medical history and which medications they take
  - This can be due to an altered mental status, inability to speak, or simply lack of knowledge of their medical conditions
- It is common for people to forget they took their medications and end up taking them twice. In the case of medications with high overdose potential, it is crucial for first responders to have an awareness of this so interventions can be made ASAP
  - Ex. Knowing a patient is prescribed narcotics would incentivize the administration of Narcan

Community Perspective

"In emergency situations, it is difficult to look around for medication bottles or lists that aren't readily available and patients or their loved ones might not know about their meds or what they're for. It makes it difficult to know what we're dealing with in terms of treating our patients."

-Anonymous EMT

"A person who is altered, you look around for anything that may have their name, birthday, prescriptions, anything to help. And a lot of people don't know their med list even if they are awake. They can barely pronounce it and even if it's written down, they don't always know what it's for."

-Anonymous EMT

Intervention

- Created an informational pamphlet about the File of Life program which included an overview of the File of Life, how to obtain one, who should have one, and how to get the medical information needed to fill out the form
- The pamphlet will be distributed to local Fire Departments and senior centers

Response

- Wrote informational pamphlet with the goal of spreading awareness about the File of Life program in the community
- Spoke with representatives from local EMS departments who were excited about more patients having a File of Life they could use during emergencies
- Local EMS groups were interested in continuing this project to further educate community members on the File of Life and similar programs

Evaluation of Effectiveness

- Due to the time constraints, the result of the distribution of this pamphlet has not been studied in the long term
- Given more time, it would be possible to assess the efficacy of the pamphlet by communicating with local EMS and fire stations about the prevalence of File of Life documents on calls

Limitations/Effectiveness

- Healthy care literacy varies greatly; this can make it difficult for people to fill out forms such as the File of Life if they have limited knowledge of their health conditions
- Additionally, most primary care offices are already short on time allotted for each patient, so taking the time to help them fill out a new form may not be plausible
- After care summaries are not routinely given out at all primary care offices and many community members, particularly the geriatric population, have difficulty accessing patient portals

Recommendations for Future Projects

- Distribution of File of Life or after care summaries directly from PCP
- Organize informational sessions hosted by local fire/EMS about File of Life program
- Create a door sticker or similar marker that indicates to first responders that there is a File of Life or other important healthcare document in the home

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