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Molly A. Markowitz

The University of Vermont College of Medicine

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Addressing Language Barriers When Working With New American Patients

Location: The University of Vermont Medical Center
Rotation: September 2016
Project Mentor: Dr. Sproul, UVMMMC Colchester Family Medicine

By: Molly Markowitz, M3
New American Families in Vermont

• According to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, between the years of 1989-2013, **6310 refugees** have settled in Vermont (1)

• According to the Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, **325 refugees** arrived in Vermont from October 2015-August 2016 (2)


• The top 10 languages spoken by refugees coming to the US from 2008-2016 were: Arabic, Nepali, Somali, Sgaw Karen, Spanish, Chaldean, Burmese, Armenian, Kiswahili, Other (2)
Addressing Language Barriers in Healthcare

• One study found that when patients received professional interpreting services, there was a significant increase in the recommendation of preventive health services discussed with patients (4)

• Another study found that language barriers led to increased resource utilization for diagnostic studies and increased number of ED visits (5)

• One review highlighted several challenges related to working with non-english speaking patients (6)
  
  • Lack of interpretation led to poor patient understanding of diagnosis and treatment.
  
  • Use of untrained interpretation led to misinterpretation and omission of up to 50% of questions by physicians
Addressing Language Barriers at UVMMC

• **Barrier:** Currently, there isn't an easy and accessible way for healthcare providers to obtain health information in different languages for patients.

• **Plan:** Create an easy and accessible way for healthcare providers to access health information in different languages and then promote its utilization.
The Community Perspective

Communicated with staff at the following:

- UVMMC in Social work/Interper services
- UVMMC Communications
- UVMMC Prism Team
- UVM, Connecting Cultures
- UVM COM Communications
- Vermont Health Department
- Vermont Family Network
Increasing Access

- After investigation and consultation with the community perspective, it was determined that Health Reach (https://healthreach.nlm.nih.gov/), put out by the National Library of Medicine, was the most comprehensive and user friendly website which provides health information in many different languages (7).

- Contacted Prism team at UVMMC to determine the process for adding Health Reach to the reference links tab in Prism.

- Determined that the request must come from a department head, thus recruited two department heads to email in a request to the Prism team.

- Request was reviewed by Prism team and the Health Reach link will be live by the middle of October, 2016.
Promoting Utilization of Health Reach

Determined three ways to promote the link:

1. Contacted the Communications Department at UVMMC to determine the best way to communicate with healthcare providers
   - Will publish an article in the employee newsletter, One, and also in a physician specific newsletter

2. Contacted the UVM COM Communications team regarding writing for the UVM Medicine Blog.
   - Will write an article specifically targeting medical students for the blog

3. Will work with the Prism team to send out a Prism update email promoting the link to all employees at UVMMC
Evaluation and Effectiveness

• Work with the Prism team to assess utilization of the link in the next several months

• Survey providers to assess for utilization of the link and its effectiveness
Recommendations for the Future

• Further promote utilization of the link by working with Communications and Social work/Interpreter services at UVMMC

• Work with Social work/Interpreter services to further educate the healthcare community regarding additional resources available to healthcare providers working with non-english speaking patients
  • Such as: in-person and remote interpretation, employee trainings


