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Assessing Patient Satisfaction in Direct Primary Healthcare: A Rural Community Health Initiative

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Assessing Patient Satisfaction in Direct Primary Healthcare

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Blue Spruce Health / Newport, VT

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Mentor: Dr. Umair Malik



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Problem Identification

Key Issue: Shortage of primary healthcare providers in Newport, VT, a rural area with limited healthcare resources.

- Impact on host community:
 - Reduced access to timely and affordable care.
 - Poorer health outcomes due to delays in treatment.
 - Increased healthcare costs from reliance on distant providers.
- **Need Being Addressed:** Assessing direct primary healthcare as a model to improve access, reduce costs, and enhance patient satisfaction.
- **AHEC Focus Area:** Medical Practice Transformation
 - Focuses on quality improvement, cost containment, rural healthcare, and care for underserved populations.

Public Health Cost

- **Public Health Cost:**

- Newport is in the Northeast Kingdom, a designated Health Professional Shortage Area. The Vermont Department of Health (DoH, 2024) states: "**Orleans County, encompassing Newport**, has a population-to-primary-care-physician ratio of **2,540:1**, compared to the statewide average of 1,780:1" (**Vermont DoH, 2024, Shortages and Designations**).

- **Cost Considerations:**

- Limited providers increase healthcare costs due to travel and delayed care. The Vermont Department of Health (2024) notes that **23% of Northeast Kingdom residents** lack adequate access to primary care, contributing to higher rates of chronic conditions.
- National data: **Rural areas have 19.5 primary care physicians per 100,000 people** vs. 53.3 in urban areas (HRSA, 2023).
- Regional Impact: Preventable hospitalizations in the Northeast Kingdom are **42% higher than Vermont's average**, reflecting insufficient primary care (Vermont DoH, 2024).

Community Perspectives

Dr. Umair Malik

Mentor, Physician at Blue Spruce Health

Role: Primary care provider and project mentor.

Perspective: Initial hurdles in setup were challenging, but direct primary healthcare reduces insurance reliance, lowers patient costs, and improves outcomes by allowing more patient interaction and less bureaucracy.

Perceived Outcome: Enhances practice sustainability and patient retention.

Chelsea Hamel

Registered Nurse at Blue Spruce Health

Role: Nurse providing patient care.

Perspective: Direct primary healthcare shifts focus to patient care from administrative tasks, a stark contrast to insurance-based systems. She prefers this model and wouldn't return to the old system.

Outcome: Improves job satisfaction, potentially attracting more professionals.

Intervention

- **Intervention:** Created and distributed a patient satisfaction survey.
- **Methodology:**
 - **Section 1:** Gathered **age, location, and membership duration** to profile patients.
 - **Section 2:** Measured **ease of reaching staff, responsiveness,** and **clarity** of instructions provided.
 - **Section 3:** Assessed **perceived cost-effectiveness, affordability,** and **financial benefits** of membership.
 - **Section 4:** Compared **accessibility, wait times,** and **satisfaction** with direct care vs. traditional insurance models..
 - **Section 5:** Collected general feedback and satisfaction ratings on a scale of 1-10, plus intent to recommend.
 - **Section 6:** Optional patient testimonials for promotional use.
- **Implementation:** Distributed to patients across ALL Blue Spruce Health's locations (Newport, St. Johnsbury, Williston).
- **Question Types:** Multiple-choice, scale (1-5), and open-ended for comprehensive data.
- Survey Link: <https://forms.gle/P9ivyALjrwZea6A7>

Results and Reflections

- **Initial Results:** Preliminary data shows participants rate accessibility and care quality as 4 or 5 out of 5.
- **Impact on Host Community:**
 - Helps Dr. Malik identify new healthcare services his patients are currently going elsewhere for to further reduce reliance on external healthcare sources.
 - Lowers total patient health costs and improves Dr. Malik's service quality and outcomes.
- **Evaluation:** Suggest quarterly trend analysis to refine services based on feedback.
- **Challenges:**
 - Small sample size limits generalizability of results.
 - Self-selecting participants may skew results. Patients with extreme opinions—either very happy (e.g., praising accessibility) or very dissatisfied (e.g., citing costs)—are more likely to respond, distorting the average and potentially overrepresenting polarized views.

Future Directions

- **Expand Survey:** Target **100+ patients** across all locations for more diverse, reliable data.
- **Investigate Benefits:** Quantify cost savings (e.g., fewer specialist visits) and health outcomes (e.g., reduced ER use) using patient records.
- **Partner Locally:** Work with Northeast Kingdom health centers to tackle barriers like transportation or food insecurity.
- **Next Steps:** Continue improving survey questions (e.g., add telehealth feedback) or link direct care to local chronic disease programs.

References and Citations

- Vermont Department of Health. (2024). *Shortages and Designations*. Retrieved from <https://www.healthvermont.gov/systems/health-professionals/shortages-and-designations>.
- Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). (2023). *Primary Care Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs)*. Retrieved from <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/shortage-areas>.
- Vermont Department of Health. (2024). *Health Equity Data*. Retrieved from <https://www.healthvermont.gov/stats/surveillance-reporting-topic/health-equity-data>.

Blue Spruce Health Patient Satisfaction Survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your feedback is essential in helping us understand your experience with Blue Spruce Health. **Your responses will be kept completely anonymous, and no personal health information will be collected.** The data will be used to identify areas for improvement and to better understand how direct primary care meets your healthcare needs. The survey should take about 5-10 minutes to complete.

We appreciate your honest feedback—it will help us continue to provide the best possible care.

Section 1: Demographics

1. What is your age group?

Mark only one oval.

- Under 18
- 18-34
- 35-54
- 55-74
- 75+

2. How long have you been a member of Blue Spruce Health?

Mark only one oval.

- 0-1 years
- 1-3 years
- 3+ years

3. Which Blue Spruce Health location do you primarily visit?

⌵ Dropdown

Mark only one oval.

- Williston, Vermont
- St Johnsbury, Vermont
- Newport, Vermont

Section 2: Communications

4. During your most recent visit, how well were your questions or concerns addressed?

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

1 (N 5 (Completely)

5. During your most recent visit, was your reason for coming addressed to your satisfaction?

Mark only one oval.

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neutral
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

6. How would you rate your interaction with the staff?

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

1 (P 5 (Excellent))

7. If you'd like, share what worked well or could be improved about your recent interactions with our staff.

Note: Leave blank if no comments.

8. How would you rate your interaction with your provider?

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

1 (P 5 (Excellent))

9. If you'd like, share what worked well or could be improved about your recent interactions with your provider.

Note: Leave blank if no comments.

10. How satisfied are you with our accessibility (e.g., getting an appointment when needed, communication options), based on your recent visits?

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

1 (V 5 (Very satisfied)

11. If you'd like, share what worked well or could be improved about our accessibility during your recent visits.

Note: Leave blank if no comments.

12. What could we do to improve our accessibility?
If you don't have any suggestions, feel free to leave this blank.

Section 3: Value

13. On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the value of your membership for the cost?

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

1 (P 5 (Excellent value)

14. What would you like to see more of at Blue Spruce Health? (e.g., services, equipment, etc.)

If you don't have any suggestions, feel free to leave this blank.

Section 4: Comparison to Insurance-Based Systems

15. Have you previously been part of an insurance-based healthcare system?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Unsure

16. If yes, how does your experience with Blue Spruce Health compare to your previous insurance-based healthcare experience?

17. What do you perceive as the main advantages of direct primary healthcare (like Blue Spruce Health) over insurance-based systems?

18. Are there any aspects of insurance-based healthcare that you miss or prefer?

Section 5: Overall Satisfaction

19. On a scale of 1 to 10, how likely are you to recommend Blue Spruce Health to a friend or family member?

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

1 (N 10 (Extremely likely)

Section 6: Marketing Quote

20. Would you like to share a brief quote about your experience with Blue Spruce Health that we may use for marketing purposes?

If you're comfortable, please share a short comment we might use to promote our practice (anonymously). Leave blank if no comments.

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