

Submission Id: 3063

Title

Experiences of ENCOMPASS Community Health Navigators during COVID-19 first wave shutdown (Spring 2020).

Priority 1 (Research Category)

Healthcare Services, Delivery, and Financing

Presenters

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Abstract

Context: During the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government of Alberta enacted restrictions to limit the spread of the virus. Patients who were enrolled in the Community Health Navigation program being evaluated in the ENCOMPASS study were recognized to be at higher risk from the virus due to socioeconomic factors and underlying chronic conditions. Moreover, reduced access to medical and social services affected care and support options for patients during the pandemic. Community health navigators (CHNs) continued to work with patients but considering the restrictions had to change their methods. Objective: To describe the experiences of CHNs working with patients with chronic conditions during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic and their perceptions about their work during this time. Study Design and Analysis: Qualitative descriptive study, using semi-structured interviews conducted by videoconference and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Setting: Mosaic Primary Care Network in Calgary, Canada. Population Studied: Transcripts of interviews with 11 CHNs. Results: Three themes are reported: 1) The pandemic revealed individual and social vulnerabilities, and system deficiencies; 2) CHNs helped fill a void in social connection for their patients; and 3) CHNs were flexible and versatile in supporting patients during a crisis. Conclusions: The findings suggest that the everyday activities of CHNs became more valued for patients and other members of the care team during the pandemic, as new ways of providing care proved effective while other services were not available or not accessible. Successes achieved over the months of restrictions normalized a way of providing services remotely that may endure after the pandemic and provide more flexibility to the program.