Children's Hospital of Philadelphia PolicyLab

Exploring the Gap: Food Insecurity and Resource Engagement

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Pediatric healthcare institutions are increasingly implementing food insecurity (FI) screens, but there is limited information about participant interest in referral and engagement with resources provided. In this descriptive cross-sectional study, we recruited participants from a consecutive sample of adult caregivers arriving with pediatric patients in the ED at an urban, freestanding children's hospital. Caregivers completed a validated, two-question screen for FI. All participants received a list of food access resources. Direct referral to a partnered community food resource agency was offered to those who screened positive for FI; that agency completed a phone call to the participant for resource provision within 2 weeks. Among the 1818 participants recruited, 20.6% (375) screened positive for FI, consistent with the area's reported child FI rate. Of those who screened positive, 54.9% (206) opted to receive a direct-referral via phone call to a food resource agency, and 35.9% (74) of these were reached by phone. 31.1% (23) of those contacted were no longer interested in food resource referrals, 10.8% (8) were signed up for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and 59.5% (44) were referred to local food pantries. Through hospital-community partnership in an initial attempt to screen and offer direct-referral for FI, we elicited considerable interest among families for connection to resource agencies. However, there was a substantial gap between referral acceptance and ultimate connection with the resource agency stemming from two major sources: inability to re-contact and loss of interest after contact.

Journal:

Academic Pediatrics
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