Newcomer and Immigrant Health Disparities: Perspectives from Newcomer Patients about Accessing the Health Care System

Healthy Lives - Healthy Communities: Building Health Equity in Missouri One Community at a Time

Columbia, MO
April 27, 2012
The purpose of the study was to:

1. Explore the process of accessing healthcare from the perspective of the immigrant or refugee.
2. Gain insight into the barriers facing refugee and immigrant patients in accessing healthcare services.
3. Learn about resources that enable them to overcome unique challenges.
Methods

- Adult newcomer patients (refugees and/or immigrants) living in Kansas City (N=15)
- Adult newcomer patients (Latino Immigrants) living in the Cassville/Monett area (N=11).
- Semi-structured interview guide and waiver of documentation of consent
- Given gift card for participation
- Interviews conducted in native languages
- Interviews translated into English
- Interviews transcribed
- Content analysis
Study Participants

- Kansas City
  - Focus on the following newcomers:
    - Arabic
    - Somali
    - Hispanic
  - Countries of Origin
    - Iraq
    - Sudan
    - Somalia
    - Mexico
    - Cuba
    - Colombia
    - Ecuador

- Cassville/Monett
  - Focus on Latino newcomers
  - Countries of Origin
    - Mexico
    - Guatemala
# Participants by Age Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Kansas City</th>
<th></th>
<th>Cassville Monett</th>
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**Kansas City**
- Women = 10
- Men = 5

**Cassville/Monett**
- Women = 8
- Men = 3

[Center for Health Policy]
University of Missouri
Participants by Household Size

Kansas City Household Size

- 1 to 2 members: 3
- 3 to 5 members: 5
- More than 5 members: 7

Cassville/Monett Household Size

- 1 to 2 members: 2
- 3 to 5 members: 8
- More than 5 members: 1

Center for Health Policy
University of Missouri
Participants by Highest Level of Education

Kansas City
Highest Level of Education

- Primary Education
- Secondary Education
- Some University
- University Diploma
- Graduate Diploma

Cassville/Monett Highest Level of Education

- Primary Education
- Secondary Education
Key Findings

- Factors that contribute to positive experiences
- Factors that contribute to negative experiences
- Suggestions from participants about what would be helpful to them.
Factors that Contribute to Positive Experiences

- Healthcare broker, case manager, health care worker, advocate—someone who can guide the patient through the complicated health care system

  - *I was in a shelter for abused women, I was pregnant and stayed there until I was transferred to [hospital]. I delivered my baby there. I thought the care, the doctors, the nurses, everyone, of course I had to use interpreter services, was excellent.* KC

  - *The other day I went to an ESL teacher …there are many times I will ask her about these things, because she knows about everything here. And also because they check the children’s eyes in school - Last year they checked them, and my daughter had one eye where her sight wasn't very good. The school sent us to the someplace in the center of town so she could get her eyesight checked, and they gave her glasses. They didn't charge much, because the school sent us.* CM
Factors that Contribute to Positive Experiences

- Availability of interpretation services
  - *I am so happy that [hospital] offered interpreters. They are kind, they take their time, if I don’t understand anything, they go back and ask the doctor to explain again and again.* KC
Factors that Contribute to Positive Experiences

- Availability of medical information, education materials in native languages
  - There is a lot of educational resources that the hospital or the health care providers they provided for the patients and they give it to the people...they give them the whole information about this disease and this disease is very risky and they give us the information from where you can get some information about this disease and which other providers can help. KC

- Availability of transportation services
  - If I don’t have someone to pick up me and drop me there they have a company, they contact the company and ask give them my information and come to take me and drop me back. It’s a really, really very good. KC
Factors that Contribute to Positive Experiences

- Affordable health care services
  - Having medical insurance helped me with the care. I am no worry that with this private insurance I can go at any doctor, clinic or hospital in town. For that reason, the medical insurance helped to get a better access to different specialists, doctors of my choice. KC

- Availability of payment options like payment plans
  - [Hospital] is a great place to have access to health care. I don’t see a problem. Even if I didn’t have insurance because I know people that go there without insurance, if you can afford to pay, they work with you. But that is not my case. Most of my treatment and perhaps I am very lucky, has been with little cost to me. KC
Factors that Contribute to Positive Experiences

- Good communication with medical and non-medical staff
  - one time my boy one year in a clinic said he was sick with the flu and had some little balls in the back of his throat. So then they said because of this he could be really sick. And I got very scared, so I took him to [DR] … I took him to [DR]l and she told me that this infection does not do anything grave, and with time it will go away. But she talked to me, examined everything, took tests and did everything there was in order to know what this could be. She told me not to worry because everything was all right. That was my experience. CM
  - She told her doctors about her feelings or perhaps not being a good mother for her new baby boy. The doctor immediately put her in contact with some support group who could help her out. KC
Factors that Contribute to Positive Experiences

- Understand the medical instructions, like how to take medications, etc…
  - *I like the doctors and nurses, they always treat you right, they explain to you things, and they even give you sometimes samples. For instance, one time, I have a little bit of problem with the nurse that was on duty and I need some questions regarding my medicine. She put me on hold and a few minutes later there was the interpreter. I though the service was just great.* KC
  
  - *For example, when I got to the hospital, with my friends, I see nurses are doing most of the services, for example they register you, they ask you the insurance information, they write down everything, they ask you how you feel and then at the end doctors came to talk to you and give you prescriptions and so on, so I would say both, nurse and doctors make it possible for these services.* KC

  - *Isn’t that great, I can get my prescription with all the directions in Spanish.* KC
Factors that Contribute to Positive Experiences

- Trust in health care provider
  - My husband wanted to stay with me over night. There was no another bed in the room, only a chair. So he sat down in the chair and tried to sleep. Around midnight, a nurse came in the room and told him, what are you doing sleeping in that chair? He panicked; he thought he was doing something wrong. He got up and stand next to me. A few minutes later she shows up with a portable bed for my husband and with some extra blankets. This was a really nice gesture, with almost zero communication besides using our hands. KC
  - because I didn't like the way they had took care of me there. I took him to Gail and she told me that this infection does not do anything grave, and with time it will go away. But she talked to me, examined everything, took tests and did everything there was in order to know what this could be. She told me not to worry because everything was all right. That was my experience. CM
Factors that Contribute to Negative Experiences

- Lack of a connection with someone who can guide the patient through the system
  - It would help to have someone there that tells us everything when you go for a check-up; someone who understands English and tells what we have and everything. CM
  - I had appointment with physical therapy at [hospital] and I went there and I had to wait four hours to see people who are doing the physical therapy. And, in addition, they asked me to pay 15 dollars, which I don’t have, because I don’t have a job…I have diabetes and I have blood pressure and in addition I don’t drive, so it was hard to find somebody who can take me to the hospital and then bring me back to my home. And I get to my appointment at 11 o’clock and I had to wait until 3 o’clock. Of course, I don’t speak English so I had to find a translator. KC
Factors that Contribute to Negative Experiences

- Lack of medical interpretation
  - Secondly, is the translations services or interpreters, translators. To be honest to you, you’re from same country but we do have different dialects. ... sometimes is very difficult to understand...or if they do not understand me or I have to tell them three to four times, they have to repeat the question or answers three to four times...I feel shame or I shy, I don’t want to hurt anybody, I don’t want to say to them :”Hey, I don’t understand you! I don’t need you!” You know, I don’t want to say that. KC

  - Well, yes it's better to have, like you say, to know and have both languages so that one knows what's going on, like knowing English. Like when one doesn’t know, for example, my little girl already knows a little bit, and she's the one that will help. If not at times, when she says she can’t understand some things we need to find someone we know understands English well. And we ask them to do us the favor of introducing us to that... CM
Factors that Contribute to Negative Experiences

- Lack of transportation services
  - *I do have a large family, and my wife does not have a driver license, and also does not speak English, so if I am working, I need transportation for my wife and my children, also I need translators for my wife, even me I don’t speak good English either. So, of course, I use three or four points from my work so I can take my wife to the hospital or my children. That’s the only option I have, so yes, I do need support; basically translators and transportation.*

- Lack of medical information, educational materials in native language
  - *Being an immigrant to this country, one of my biggest worry is the lack of information available in Spanish. Like I mentioned before, there is some, but I would like to see a lot more. Ideal would be to have a special place where you can go or call in your own language, to ask for information.*
Factors that Contribute to Negative Experiences

- Lack of health care insurance
  - Another experience I have is with a friend of mine who suffer almost the same thing I do. She doesn’t have any help, she is not a refugee. She only goes to clinic, because [hospital] have told her in another words do not come back if you cannot pay.
  - I have a big family, we try to keep healthy, but at high cost from our pocket. For instance, we have our yearly checkups. Since we don’t have insurance, the cost is very high.

- Lack of access to dental care
  - One complain will be, what about dental help? A lot of refugees come with bad teeth, but that is not offered and if you look at the mouth of many refugees, there are teeth missing. In United States, you should not have those scars in your mouth. I get money from the government and I can tell you I get a little bit over 1,000. That’s a lot of money that I’m getting just to be here, but it is not enough for me to pay for dental care.
Factors that Contribute to Negative Experiences

- Difficulty accessing health care services
  - [Hospital] is a hospital that should not deny service to anybody. Well, at least that what they say. But it is changing. It is harder to access. The only way people can go is through emergency.

- Long waiting time to access the services—especially ER (KC)
  - Wait times mentioned in hours included: 11, 10+, 6 (with kids), 12, 15+, 10 (twice).

- Lack of patient support groups in native languages (KC)
  - [Hospital] should offer support groups in Spanish or other languages. They should be formed at the hospital, where people know who else has the same illness, like in my case.
Factors that Contribute to Negative Experiences

- Concern over communication with medical and non-medical staff
  - Perceived inappropriate communication
    - Most of the time they were laughing at me because I was trying to speak in my Native language and, so I ask her why, why they are doing this and all that and she told it’s because there is no translators available.

- Lack of trust in health care providers

- Lack of payment options for services, lack of payment plans, lack of flexibility from the hospital
  - Payment plans- Hispanics are known to pay, so if you have a payment plan, even 5 dollars a week, for any amount of year, they will pay it.
Concern over Cost of Health Care Services

- How expensive services are
  - Not being able to afford the co-pays and other out-of-pocket expenses
- Afraid of losing insurance
- Confusion about what is covered and what is not covered
- Perception that the system is unfair when it comes to the way rates and fees are calculated
Effects on Outcomes

- Delay or stop of care due to cost
  - I’ve been to the doctor while I had health insurance from my job and in that case it did not cover 100% but it’s still health insurance so I was able to go and see a doctor. And also, when I don’t have health insurance I don’t go to doctor because I am afraid they’re going to charge me too much. Later on I have to pay that money back to the doctors, so I stay at home while I don’t have health insurance, even if I am sick.

- Fear of getting sick and not be able to get care
  - The biggest challenge is that I went to the hospital when I was sick and they not really treat me. So that was the biggest challenge.

- Believe that the ER is the only way of getting services
What Newcomers and Immigrants Said Would be Helpful to Them

- Hospital bill payment options, like payment plans offered equality to immigrant and refugee patients.
  - Regarding the cost at [hospital], payments …would be great to have a payment plan available according to our income. This payment plan should be presented to us as an option. Right now, you go to [hospital], you need something, a test, see a doctor immediately they say this is your cost, pay it, or leave it. And that way we are denied access to health care.
  - Payment plans; I know if you told me I can pay 10-20 dollars a week, I will do it, but we are not informed about this, we just get this huge bill over the mail. Give the opportunity; don’t just say your treatment will be 5,000 dollars. Many people just listening to that amount, they will never go back.
What Newcomers and Immigrants Said Would be Helpful to Them

- Trained interpreters
- More flexibility in timing of medical tests, especially when patients don’t have cannot afford paying for multiple tests in one visit
- Disease-based support groups for immigrant groups, as well as other types of medical or health care system information like what Medicaid covers and what not, etc.
What Newcomers and Immigrants Said Would be Helpful to Them

- Providers educated on cultural differences.
  - [Hospital] sees many immigrants from all over the world. I think their nurses, doctors, everyone who works should be educated about cultures and culture difference. This is their job. We are the patients, regardless if you speak English, Spanish, Portuguese or any other language. They need to be trained to work with people who has limited English. We need to be at work, we need things to be done fast.
- Flexibility and availability of health care services in the evenings and weekends.
- Support to help them find and access services.