4-29-2020

Addressing The Social Determinants of Health in the Clinic Setting

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Recommended Citation

Sharma, Larissa and Tran, Man, "Addressing The Social Determinants of Health in the Clinic Setting" (2020). Providence St. Vincent Internal Medicine. 5.  
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It is estimated that clinical care accounts for only 20% of health, while behaviors, physical environment, and social and economic factors determine the rest.

The social determinants of health include the basic life needs of housing, food, transport, along with other factors that include employment, education, drug and alcohol use, dental and eye care, etc.

Insecurity in these socioeconomic factors are expressed in chronic medical illness, mental health problems, substance use, all leading to high healthcare utilization. Healthcare costs and utilization decrease when these needs are provided for.

In a survey of 6,000 Providence patients, 50% expressed a social determinant need.

Providence subsidizes Community Resource Desks around Oregon, staffed with bi-lingual resource specialists from local social service organizations, designed to connect individuals in need of support with resources available in their community.

A model for referral to a local Community Resource Desk was created and patients referred to the desk to provide for any social needs.

This system allows for more comprehensive care, streamlines workflow for providers, and allows providers to practice in a way more in line with their goals. In addition, multiple studies show cost savings benefits to implementing similar programs.

1.) Winfield L, DeSalvo K, Muhlestein D. Social Determinants Matter, but Who is Responsible? Salt Lake City, Utah: Leavitt Partners; 2018