PATIENTS’ USE OF A MEDICAL STUDENT-RUN HEALTH CLINICS

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INTRODUCTION: Every year, more patients access health services at medical student-run health clinics. Understanding utilization of these clinics can highlight deficiencies among safety-net providers.

METHODS: We conducted semi-structured interviews with patients of a medical student-run health clinic in Philadelphia, PA.

RESULTS: Thematic saturation was achieved with fourteen patients, of mean age 44, most (13/14) were male, and all were Black/African American.

Patients described advantages to the student-run clinic over other providers, including the short wait-time to see a physician (10), access to other resources at the clinic site (9), courteousness of the student staff (7) and comfortable atmosphere (7). Half explicitly cited the fact that the clinic was free as important. Some (3) expressed non-specific unease with large medical institutions, could not contact providers assigned by public insurance (2), described the clinic as their nearest source of care (1), or appreciated its nighttime operating hours (1). All patients presented with acute, non-emergent complaints.

We identified four utilization patterns. Patients use the student-run clinic as 1) their primary provider; 2) a co-provider in conjunction with other providers; or, 3) a resource used opportunistically; the rest were 4) first-time clients whose use defies categorization at this point.

CONCLUSION: The unique structure of a medical student-run clinic endows unique benefits for poor patients in terms of its setting, character, and operation. Student-run clinics can serve patients unsatisfied with existing accessible care. Future discussions of public health should account for the impact and lessons of local medical student-run health clinics.

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Project website: http://www.med.upenn.edu/studentrunclinics