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Health Equity

HEALTH EQUITY UPDATES

September 2022

Trends on Social Needs Screening in Healthcare

The Social Interventions Research and Evaluation Network (SIREN) released a report that synthesizes the latest research on health-related social needs screening in healthcare settings. The report, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, summarizes the prevalence of screening, the validity of screening tools, and patient and provider perspectives on the process.

Healthcare organizations are increasingly motivated to identify and address social needs to improve their patients' health outcomes. This includes the implementation of more standardized processes for screening and referrals to resources as part of the clinical workflow. However, the report highlights that due to a lack of rigorous studies on social screening and variations in how organizations approach the process, it is difficult to compare findings across studies and extract "generalizable" findings.

The SIREN report does provide some key takeaways:

- Knowledge about screening prevalence in U.S. healthcare settings is scarce, making it difficult to assess the impacts of the investments in addressing health related social needs.

- There are variations in use of screening tools, with some organizations using existing tools and others customizing existing tools to meet the organization's preferences. This raises questions about the "psychometric and pragmatic properties" of the tools, especially relative to culturally and linguistically diverse patient populations.

- Generally, patients and their caregivers find social screening to a be a positive part of their healthcare experience, as do the providers conducting the screening who acknowledge the benefits.

This Month

Hunger Action Month

September is Hunger Action Month to raise awareness of the 38 million people living in food insecure households in the U.S. According to the USDA, food insecurity is "the lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, health life." Food insecurity is associated with an increased risk of adverse health outcomes and is influenced by a number of factors such as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status and geography.

According to a May 2022 report prepared for Feeding America, in 2020, 6.8% of the 76 million persons age 60 and older were food insecure, and 2.6% experienced very low food security (VLSF). Food insecurity continues to be greatest among Hispanic and Black individuals.

Healthy People 2030 has set a goal to reduce food insecurity to 6% from the current national average of 10.5%. Healthcare organizations can play a vital role in achieving this goal by screening all patients for food insecurity.

In the News

NQF 2022 Key Measures to Advance Rural Health

CMS provided funding for the National Quality Forum (NQF) to reconvene the Rural Health Advisory Group to update 2018 key rural measures to advance rural health priorities. The workgroup released a report in August that presents the final 37 rural measures that include 21 hospital setting measures and 16 ambulatory care setting measures. The list of measures can be used to guide performance and quality improvement efforts for healthcare organizations providing care in rural areas.

Mass General Brigham Confronts Racism

Boston-based Mass General Brigham is implementing a campaign called United Against Racism to confront and address the impacts of systemic racism on the health system's patients, employees and community. The initiative includes more than a dozen programs across various clinics and hospitals to address disparities by providing antiracist care for their patient populations.

HHS Action Plan on Long COVID

HHS released two reports in August that outline an actionable path forward for addressing Long COVID and its associated conditions. Racial and ethnic minorities, older adults, people with disabilities and those with a lower socioeconomic status had higher rates of COVID infection, hospitalization, and mortality. The reports include actions to address the implications of Long COVID on health equity and its potential to further exacerbate disparities for these populations.

Lessons from CMS' Accountable Health Communities Model

The Accountable Health Communities Model was CMS' first model that focused on evaluating health related social needs (HRSNs) screening, referral, and navigation. In this Health Affairs article, CMS shares key evaluation findings, lessons learned, and promising evidence and practices that providers and payers can implement to address the HRSNs of their patients and communities.

CMS Rule Advances Health Equity

In August, CMS issued a final rule for inpatient and long-term hospitals to encourage hospitals to build health equity into their core functions. The rule includes three health equity measures in hospital quality programs. The first measure will assess a hospital's commitment to establishing a culture of equity and delivering more equitable care by capturing activities across five domains. The other two measures capture screening and identification of patient health related social needs. CMS is also creating a "birthing-friendly" hospital designation and additional quality measures to drive maternal health outcomes improvement.

Health Equity in Response to Drug Overdose Training

NAACHO is offering a 12-module, free online course designed to guide health providers to integrate health equity into their drug overdose prevention and response efforts. The course was designed to be taken individually or as a group, using the course's supplemental materials.

Visit the IPRO Resource Library: https://qi-library.ipro.org/

Upcoming Events

SDOH: Advancing Health Equity in Your Community

Center for Practical Bioethics

Date: September 8, 2022

Time: 1:00 – 2:00 PM ET

Assessing Patient Experience for Insights into Enhancing Equity in Healthcare

cahps®

Date: September 22, 2022

Time: 11:00 AM – 4:00 PM ET

Introduction to the AHRQ Decarbonization Toolkit

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

Date: September 22, 2022

Time: 12:30 PM ET