



Data and Information Tools to Tackle Population Health Challenges in Your Community

Eric Fleegler, MD, MPH

Name of project or collaborative

HelpSteps.com

Geography

Greater Boston Area with a pilot project in Little Rock, Arkansas

Brief Description

HelpSteps.com is an assessment and referral system for families' and individuals' social determinants of health. Though the referral system is potentially applicable for anyone's social needs, such as services related to domestic violence and safety equipment, the system is primarily focused on issues that affect lower socioeconomic families including services related to food insecurity, housing, and income resources, among others. HelpSteps.com assesses needs in 13 broad social domains and provides access to resources related to over 100 social problems.

The system has been implemented and used by a variety of social services, the Boston Public Health Commission, The Mayor's Health Line, medical clinics and free clinics throughout Boston. It is available freely online for anyone to use. Some agencies use it as a screening tool, others use it as a direct referral system when someone identifies a specific social problem. Work began on HelpSteps.com as a research project in 2003 and was fully implemented as a referral system in 2007.

Relevance of project to this breakout session

HelpSteps.com provides assessment of significant social determinants of health that most medical centers are not able or willing to perform. Among the concerns providers have about assessing these types of problems are (1) not knowing what questions to ask, (2) fear of opening Pandora's Box, (3) not having the time to assess these problems, and (4) not knowing where to refer patients for these problems. HelpSteps.com offers a solution to all of these problems.

Results/outcomes

We have studied HelpSteps.com extensively in multiple clinical environments. Our main findings include:

- 82% of families in urban clinics experience at least one type of social problem in a given year, and >50% experience two or more problems.
- Families are interested in assessment and referrals. In one study of 405 young adults, ages 15-25, 78% participated in the assessment system, 80% selected referrals, and in total over 1500 referrals to various services were selected.
- When asked if assessment and referral of social services was appropriate in the medical setting, 92% agreed.
- Referrals help: 40% of individuals who selected referrals followed up with one of their selections, and 52% stated that their social problem had either 'completely' or 'mostly' resolved.
- >80% stated they would like to use HelpSteps.com as part of an annual assessment and >80% would recommend it to their families and friends.

- Annually over 5000 referrals are provided around the city.

Funding

Initial funding came from a \$2500 AMA Foundation seed grant. This funding quickly grew with grants for project development, research, and clinic support. Over the first 5 years approximately \$400k was raised for the development and spread of the system. Ongoing support of the database of social services and spread of the system to new agencies comes from Boston Children's Hospital, the Boston Public Health Commission and small grants.

Contact

eric.fleegler@childrens.harvard.edu

aaron@helpsteps.com

Website:

www.HelpSteps.com