

The intersection of foster care and primary care in Oregon: Characterizing foster youth and their healthcare needs in community health centers

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TOPIC/TARGET AUDIENCE: DHS employees, Community Health Centers, Child welfare advocates,

ABSTRACT: Context: Children in foster care are a vulnerable population with inconsistent healthcare access. Understanding the health and social needs of these children is important to guide primary care provision.

Objective: Identify and characterize a cohort of children with foster care system contact who access care at community health centers (CHCs) in Oregon.

Design: Secondary analysis of electronic health record (EHR) data from the OCHIN community health information network.

Patients: Pediatric patients with ≥1 ambulatory visit in 2014-2016 (N=144,322). We identified a cohort of 6,676 foster care patients through EHR and Medicaid enrollment information.

Results: Approximately 5% of Oregon CHC patients under age 21 had indication of foster care status in the study period. Foster children were slightly older, poorer, more commonly non-Hispanic, and black. Foster youth had higher utilization rates, but were less likely to have a primary care provider. They were more commonly Medicaid-insured and had more frequent changes in insurance status. Children with foster system contact had higher levels of medical complexity, with disproportionate mental health, and intellectual/developmental delay diagnoses.

Conclusions: In Oregon, a large cohort of children in the foster care system utilize CHCs, facilitating much-needed research on the health and disparities experienced by this vulnerable population.

OBJECTIVE(S):

- Characterize the demographics of children with foster system contact who access care in community health centers.
- Identify disparities in primary care access and utilization for foster care patients.
- Discuss the factors contributing to disproportionate medical complexity of children in the Oregon foster care system.

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