

Disparities in Healthcare Faced by the Migrant Population

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Community Organization

- **Organization:** Northwest Michigan Health Services Inc. (NMHSI)
- **Mission:** provide quality healthcare, including medical, dental, and behavioral health services, to members of surrounding communities with an emphasis on serving with compassion and dignity
- **Population served:** underserved populations in Michigan, with a strong focus on migrant and seasonal workers and their families



Personal Growth

Understanding community issues:

- Recognized the challenges faced by the migrant population, especially undocumented immigrants, to establish a better life for their families
- Learned that finances are not the only barrier to receiving proper medical care; immigration status and language can also prevent access to treatment

Personal awareness:

- Witnessed how showing respect for a patient's language and culture can help gain their trust and strengthen the patient-physician relationship
- Opened my eyes to the health disparities that face marginalized groups in the United States

Future career plans:

- Working at NMHSI reaffirmed my desire to enter the medical field. Everyday, I witnessed the impact the healthcare providers had on the lives of their patients, and I hoped to one day be able to care for people in the same way.
- This experience showed me the importance of recognizing social determinants of health and shaped my desire to advocate for equal and affordable healthcare access for all my patients.

Community Impact

What I did:

- Visited migrant camps with a Community Health Worker to pass out brochures and inform the people living there about the services the clinic offered
- Conversated with the people I met in their preferred language, either English or Spanish, and listened to their stories
- Designed a pregnancy packet for expecting mothers and translated it to Spanish
- Enrolled patients in the Fruit and Veggie Rx Program where they could attend cooking classes at the local farmers' market and receive free fresh produce
- Assisted the primary care providers with outreach events, including a sports physical clinic for high school students and appointment registration events at a local laundromat and senior center for members of the community

Why does it matter?

- Migrant workers and their families, many of whom are undocumented, come from Mexico and Central America to harvest cherries as well as grapes, asparagus, strawberries, and apples in Northwest Michigan. These migrants often do not receive the healthcare they need due to the lack of economic resources or, if they are undocumented, fear of being discovered by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).
- All human beings, regardless of their income or immigration status, should have access to medical care. I encountered mothers who received no prenatal care, diabetics who had gone months without insulin, and a boy with severe ADHD that made schoolwork nearly impossible; they all were people who desperately needed medical treatment but did not see a primary care provider right away out of fear of deportation or lack of financial means.



Challenges and Rewards

Challenges:

- Gaining the trust of the migrant workers, especially those who were undocumented
- Overcoming the language and cultural barriers to better understand the needs of the patients
- Accepting the fact that not everyone wanted my help; many people closed their doors in my face, but the ones who I was able to serve made my efforts worthwhile
- Only being able to address the healthcare needs of the migrant families, despite encountering inhumane living conditions and lack of access to proper education



Rewards:

- Learned more about the cultures of the people I met and had the opportunity to practice speaking Spanish
- Gained insight into how I can approach my future patients who will inevitably have different values and experiences than my own
- Witnessed the positive impact the clinic made in the community, especially in the lives of the most vulnerable



Academic Learning

Preparing for the Medical Profession:

- Discerned the importance of addressing social determinants of health as a future physician
- Recognized how a strong patient-physician relationship built on trust and understanding can lead to improved health outcomes
- Further confirmed my desire to become a physician rather than a nurse practitioner, physician assistant, or other healthcare professional.

Learning Outside the Classroom:

- Encountered a marginalized population and listened to their experiences with the U.S. healthcare system
- Saw first-hand the nearly uninhabitable living conditions in which migrant workers and their families were provided, further revealing the socioeconomic disparities that exist within the United States
- Learned how healthcare professionals can be advocates for vulnerable patients who cannot speak for themselves

Thank You...



- The University of Notre Dame for granting me the opportunity to serve and learn through the Summer Service Learning Program (SSLP)
- Northwest Michigan Health Services, Inc. for allowing me to work with primary care providers and community health workers to provide healthcare access to the most vulnerable members of the community
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