Relationship Between Disability and Access Barriers to Health Care Related Services

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Background

• Research to date has not examined the health care experiences of persons with disabilities, which constitutes a critical gap given the increased risk of chronic illness faced by this population.

• Access to care and patient-provider communication are critical to ensure the delivery of high quality care that is coordinated and continuous.

Objective

The purpose of this study was to assess the relationship between disability and physical and communication-related barriers to health care related services.

Methods

• The study was based on a random-digit-dial computer-assisted telephone interview survey of adult Florida residents aged 18+ (N=1,442) conducted by the Bureau of Economic and Business Research.

• Multivariable logistic regression analysis was used to assess the relationship between disability and experience of each barrier separately.

• Additional models ascertained whether there was a relationship between disability and experience of each barrier separately.

Explanatory Variables

• Disability status was ascertained by two questions, consistent with CDC definitions. Respondents were defined as having a disability if they indicated yes to one of the following questions:

  1. Are you limited in any way in any activities because of physical, mental, or emotional problems?

  2. Do you now have any health problem that requires you to use special equipment, such as a cane, a wheelchair, or a special telephone?

Dependent Variables

• Respondents were asked to indicate whether they experienced one of eight health care access difficulties in the previous 12 months (yes/no): Obtaining transportation, getting into the building, getting into the exam room, getting on the exam table, getting a physical examination, communicating or talking with doctor, finding doctor that understands health condition, coordinating care between providers.

Control Variables

• Age, gender, race/ethnicity, language, income, education, and marital status

Quantitative Analyses

• Descriptive analyses were conducted.

• Odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) were estimated using multivariable logistic regression models.

• All analyses performed using Stata v 10.

Results

• Thirty-three percent of the respondent sample had a self-reported disability.

Table 1. Percentage of Respondents Experiencing Physical and Communication-related Barriers While Seeking Health Care Related Services by Disability Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Barriers</th>
<th>Disabled (n=477)</th>
<th>Non-Disabled (n=965)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining Transportatio</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting into the building</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting into the exam room</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting on the exam room</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting a physical exam</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication-related Barriers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with Doctor</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor understands condition</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinating care</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced ≥ 1 barriers</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**All findings were statistically significant (p<0.05)**

Discussion

• Persons with disabilities experience disproportionately higher physical and communication-related barriers.

• Health care access difficulties can impede the delivery of high quality care both within and between physician visits, further diminishing the coordination and continuity of care.

Implications for policy and practice

✓ Efforts to reduce physical barriers and improve communication between physicians and persons with disabilities may improve functional status and quality of life for these patients.

✓ To improve the care experience for these patients it is important to understand the current barriers to seeking health care-related services.