Recognizing Barriers to Rural Health Care

2018 WV Rural Health Conference

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Objectives

1. Recognize the variety and extent of social, economic, geographic, and cultural barriers that hinder residents of rural West Virginia from accessing quality, comprehensive health care.
2. Discuss interventions and referrals that can be made by an individual provider or healthcare worker to improve a rural patient's access and overall health outcomes.
3. Propose and exchange methods for improving rural patients' access to healthcare services through open discussion.

Introduction

Defining "access" and its importance in WV

Figure 1 - RED Quote. Adapted from "Social Good Summit 2015: Inspiring Quotes for Global Citizens," by C. Donnelly, 2015, *(BLOG)RED*. Retrieved September 5, 2018 from http://blog.red.org/2015/09/social-good-summit-2015-inspiring.html. Copyright 2015 by RED.

Defining Access to Health Services

- Key goal of Healthy People 2020

- "The timely use of personal health services to achieve the best health outcomes."[1]

- Function of multiple complex factors

Why is access to health care important?

- According to Healthy People 2020, adequate access to health care is key for:[2]
  - Overall physical, social, and mental health status
  - Prevention of disease
  - Detection and treatment of illnesses
  - Quality of life
  - Preventable death
  - Life expectancy

Fast Stats on health factors in WV

- 1st in the nation for the prevalence of:[3]
  - Poor physical health
  - Poor mental health
  - Activity limitations due to poor health
- Higher-than-average mortality rates for heart disease, COPD, cancer, stroke, DM and in the infant population.[4]
- 1st in the nation for drug overdose mortality.[5]
- Nearly 20% of adults do not have a personal health care provider.[3]
- Almost 15% of WV adults couldn't afford medical care in the past year.[3]

Defining Access to Health Services

- No question that WV patients tend to have worse health and worse outcomes than patients elsewhere in the US.

- Our **worst** counties for healthcare outcomes are our most rural counties![3,6]

Rank 1-14   Rank 15-28   Rank 29-41   Rank 42-55

Figure 3 - Overall Health Factors by County. Adapted from University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute's *County Health Rankings 2018.* Retrieved September 6, 2018 from: http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings/reports/state-reports/2018/west-virginia. Copyright 2018 University of Wisconsin.

Rank 1-14   Rank 15-28   Rank 29-41   Rank 42-55

Defining Access to Health Services

- Access goes beyond simple location of facilities and patient residences.

- To truly know how to fight our "enemy", we have to understand the factors that influence it!

Looking Deeper

Specific factors affecting healthcare access for residents of rural WV
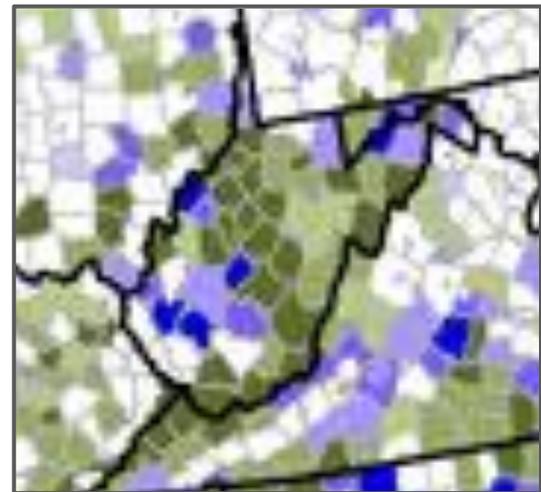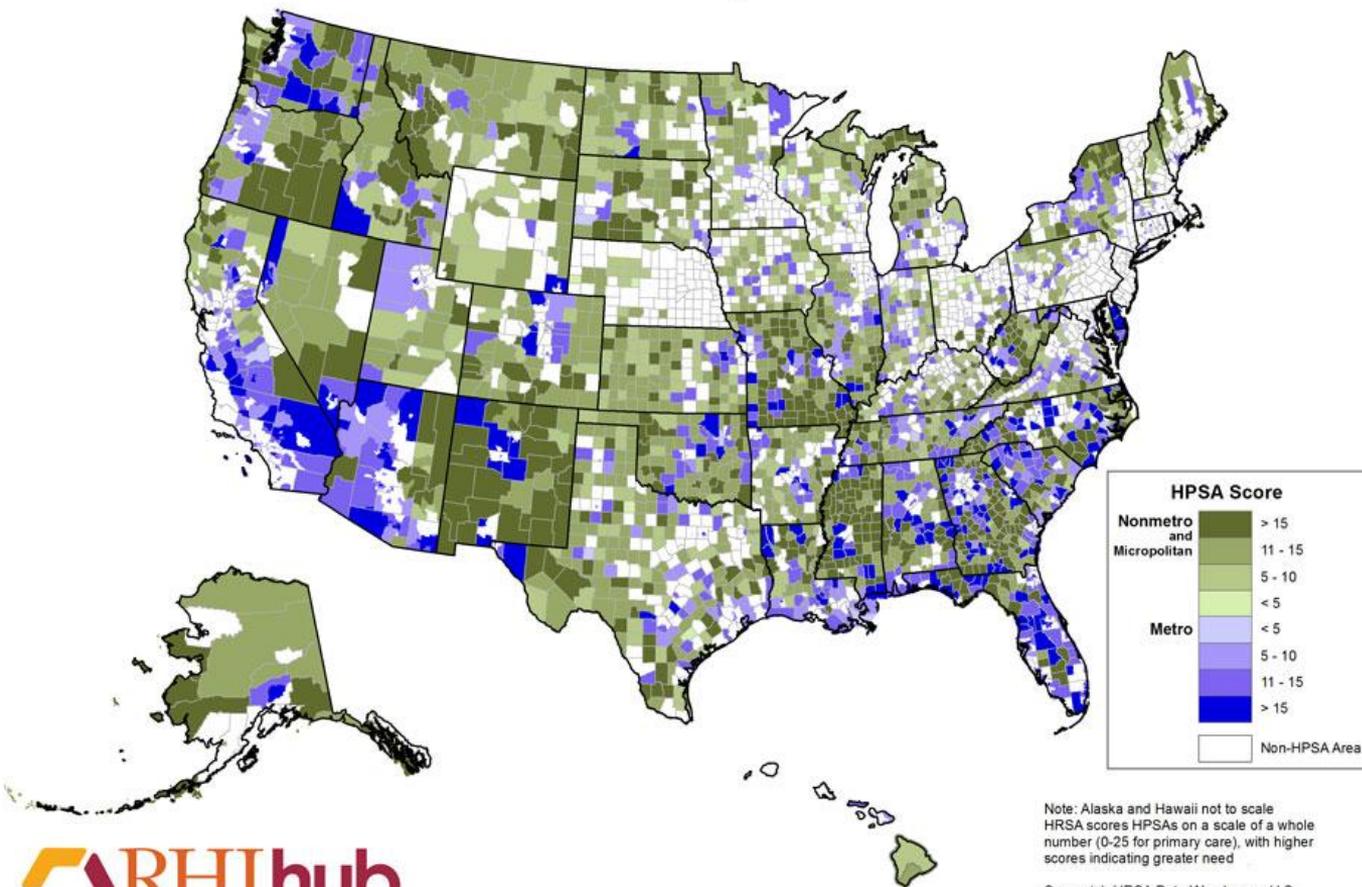
Exploring Barriers to Access

- <u>Rural patients</u> - often have to travel greater distances
- It's not just the physical distance that plays a role…[7]
  - Extreme weather conditions
  - Environmental barriers and challenging roads
  - Lack of personal transportation
  - Lack of public transportation
  - Cost associated with transportation

Exploring Barriers to Access

- <u>Rural facilities</u> - typically small, with limited services
- Disproportionately low numbers of providers vs. patients![7]
  - Rural America makes up about 20% of the US population
  - Less than 10% of providers and dentists practice rurally
  - Many EMS providers are volunteers
- WV has some particularly striking disparities:[4]
  - Specialists per 100,000 people in WV - **21%** below US average
  - Dentists per 100,000 people in WV - **24%** below US average
  - Mental Health providers per 100,000 people in WV - **45%** below

Health Professional Shortage Areas
Primary Care

HPSA Score

Nonmetro and Micropolitan	
	> 15
	11 - 15
	5 - 10
	< 5

Metro	
	< 5
	5 - 10
	11 - 15
	> 15

| | Non-HPSA Area |

Note: Alaska and Hawaii not to scale
HRSA scores HPSAs on a scale of a whole number (0-25 for primary care), with higher scores indicating greater need

Source(s): HRSA Data Warehouse, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, November 2017

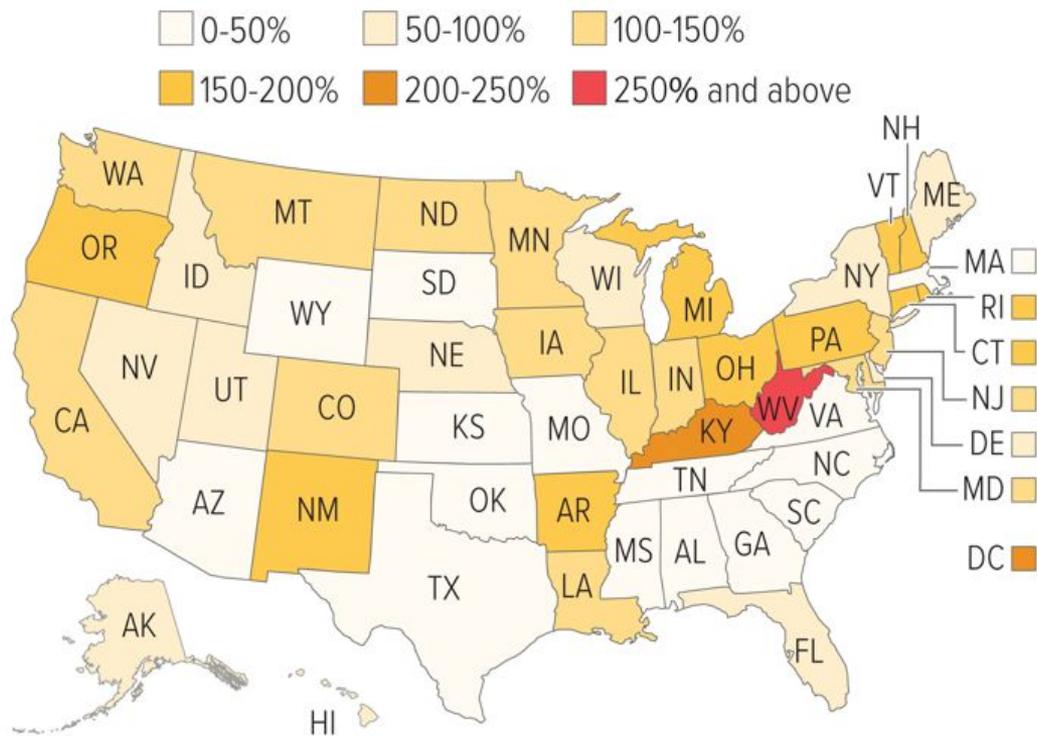RHIhub
Rural Health Information Hub

Exploring Barriers to Access

- <u>Economics</u> - WV patients often simply have less financial resources to afford health care
- Income in WV
  - WV household median income - 25% less than US median[4]
  - WV household poverty rate - almost 1 in 5 (19.4%)[11]
- Insurance is a key role in affordability of healthcare!
  - 9.3% of adults aged 18-64 are uninsured[3]
  - If the ACA were repealed, estimated that WV would be the 2nd most affected state in the US[8]

West Virginia Would See Largest Increase in Uninsured Rate Under Senate Bill

Percent increase in non-elderly uninsured rate due to Senate bill, 2022

Legend:
- 0-50%
- 50-100%
- 100-150%
- 150-200%
- 200-250%
- 250% and above

Source: Urban Institute

Exploring Barriers to Access

- <u>Societal</u> - Multiple factors that can have negative impacts!
  - <u>Priorities</u> - Close-knit, family-centric nature of Appalachian society leads to the propensity to put self last and take care of other family members and problems first[9]
  - <u>Low Health Literacy</u> - lack of knowledge on disease, treatment[9,10]
  - <u>Societal Acceptance</u> - obesity, poor health are societal norms[10]
  - <u>Quality of Care</u> - Many rural facilities have limited resources, do not have the same quality of care outcomes as urban facilities[4,7]

Exploring Barriers to Access

- Cultural - Multiple factors that can have negative impacts!
  - Self-Reliance - Strong emphasis on taking care of problems oneself; reliance on medication is seen as a flaw[9]
  - Religion - Preference for divine healing, rather than medicine[9]
  - Fatalism - A strong belief that "what will be, will be"[9,10]
  - Mistrust - Of providers, quality of care, necessity of care[9,10]

Taking Action

What can we do to improve the outcomes of care in rural patients?

Strategies to Improve Access

- Transportation - One of the biggest challenges for rural patients!
  - Public Transportation Providers Directory
    - https://transportation.wv.gov/publictransit/Pages/OnlineDirectory.aspx
    - There may be more options available than you think!
    - Many providers have restrictions on who they accept--e.g., only clients of their facility[12]
  - Home Health - can provide valuable services including skilled nursing care and therapy visits[13]
    - Limited by insurance coverage

Strategies to Improve Access

- Telehealth - Multifaceted, growing area of care provision
  - Increases quality of care, reduces readmissions and unnecessary ER visits, and improves quality of care at rural facilities[14]
  - Multiple specialities - has been used for primary care services as well as psychiatry, radiology, ophthalmology, cardiology, audiology, dental care, cardiology, oncology and more[15]
  - Multiple modalities - includes chronic care, urgent care, home monitoring services, interpreter services, pharmacy counseling, psychiatric therapy[15]

Strategies to Improve Access

- Financial Support - Working around affordability of care
  - Medicare/Medicaid and ACA - ensuring patients who may be eligible are enrolled appropriately
  - Federally Qualified Health Centers - often offer reduced rates, sliding-scale provision of care to patients who are lower income and/or do not have insurance[17]
  - Pay-Up-Front Services - some non-FQHC facilities offer reduced rates for cash-pay or uninsured patients

Strategies to Improve Access

- Financial Support - Working around affordability of care
  - Pharmaceutical Care - Walmart $4 drug list, discount programs (GoodRx), pharmaceutical company relief programs
  - Student Services - Routine care such as dental cleanings, health screenings, imaging studies may be offered at reduced or no cost by local health science schools

Strategies to Improve Access

- Health Literacy - Making sure patients understand!
  - Patient Handouts - Look for options with simple, easy-to-understand language (6th grade level or below)[18]
  - Multiple Teaching Methods - speaking with patients as well as use of visual models, hands-on training as appropriate[19]
  - Making Teaching a Team Effort - utilizing other individuals who can help reinforce key education points
  - Teach-Back Method - Having patients "teach back" the key points from their plan of care

Strategies to Improve Access

- Cultural/Societal Barriers - Building trust with patients
  - Rapport - Spending more time in the room with patients to build personal relationships, especially before pushing them to make major life changes[10]
  - Respect - Showing respect for beliefs, including those we do not personally agree with[21]
  - Acknowledging Privacy and Independence - Keeping traditional Appalachian cultural values in mind and recognizing the importance of these to our patients[10]

Sharing Thoughts

What are your experiences with addressing barriers to care in rural patients?

Thank you for your attention!

Any Questions?

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