Assessing Food Insecurity in Patient with Diabetes in the Out-Patient Setting: A Quality Improvement Initiative

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Background

Diabetes management can be stressful due to the many required responsibilities; however, when compounded with social influencers of health like poverty, lack of education, geography, access to care and healthy food, and transportation it becomes an even bigger challenge. Food-insecure individuals with diabetes find themselves caught between competing priorities such as procuring food, prescribed medications and supplies for diabetes, and managing other living expenses, potentially worsening their condition and overall health. Especially considering the COVID-19 pandemic, we suspect an even greater degree of diabetes distress and food insecurities compared to normal times.

Specific Aims

The purpose of this project is to identify individuals with food insecurities and take steps to address them.

Design

To assess food insecurity more consistently and provide solutions to potentially unmet needs, we used a validated tool based on the U.S. Household Food Security Survey Model which includes 18 items. The modified survey contains 2 items. This survey was made available in English and Spanish.

Methods and Results

Questionnaire:

Think about how you have felt about these 2 questions over the past 12 months. Please circle the answer that best describes how much these problems have affected you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within the past 12 months, did you ever worry whether your food would run out before you got money to buy more?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Within the past 12 months, was there ever a time when the food you bought just didn’t last and you didn’t have money to get more?</td>
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If patients screen positive for the food insecurity (any one question answered ‘yes’), patients were helped to identify resources for free food by collaborating with the Community Health and Well Being department. Trinity Health has initiated an approach called Social Care. Social Care is the collaboration between clinical providers and community service agencies to help patients with what they need beyond clinical treatment.

**Access to Healthy Food, Joan Dauber Food Pantry and Connecticut Dairy Farmer to Food Pantry Cooler Grant Program**

- Foodshare – many locations for patients to obtain free food in their community

References


Discussion

Total screened were 483 and of which 55 (11%) patients admitted to Food Insecurity. All patients who screened positive were referred to Foodshare resources from our department. Research shows that interventions that improve socio-environmental conditions can lead to better health and reduce health disparities. A 2016 randomized controlled trial suggested that “patient prioritized planning” that incorporated knowledge of the individual patient’s financial, social, and emotional needs is an important step to address food insecurities.

Conclusion

To date, we are aware of food insecurity only when we ask questions on the initial diabetes education assessment and have found that 11% of the patients screened admitted to having food insecurity. Healthcare providers should be aware and informed about the significant role that food security plays in the management of diabetes.