A Psychosocial Approach to Enhance the Experience of Families who Travel to The United States for Medical Care
My Background
Objectives

1. Identify at least 3 challenges unique to families who travel internationally for medical care

2. Identify at least 3 recommendations for social work practice with international patients and families

3. Describe a process model for thoroughly assessing international patient requests from a biopsychosocial perspective
Nationwide children’s hospital

- Columbus, Ohio
- Pediatric care facility
- 1M patients visit each year
- Research Institute
- International Patient Group:
  - Largely self-pay
  - Some embassy/government pay patients
  - Small number of charity patients
  - Inpatient, outpatient, research
A Unique Population

International patients and families experience unique challenges compared to domestic peers

1. Language barriers
2. Unfamiliar culture
3. Distance from support system
4. Limited financial resources
Language Barriers

- Interpreters available for medical needs
- Consider navigating airport, city transportation, hotel, restaurants
- Often feel deep connection with interpreter
- Consider same interpreter for consistency
- Assessment of boundary-crossing potential

Unfamiliar Culture

- Gender roles
- Religious considerations
- Pace and timing
- Food
- Hospital setting, medicine
Distance from Support System

- Often patient travels with one parent
  - Siblings, parent, spouses, grandparents, friends remain in home country
- Difficult for parent to share duties of care, time at bedside
- Feelings of isolation, loneliness, stress
- Supplemented by Skype, FaceTime, phone calls, etc.
Limited Financial Resources

- International patients typically travel to the U.S. with visitor/tourism visas
- Because they are not permanent residents of the U.S. they are not eligible for Medicaid or insurance through Marketplace
- May be excluded from other hospital or community funds due to residency status
Recommendations for SW Practice

1. Psychosocial Assessment - Appendix 1
2. Orientation to hospital
3. Community Connections
4. Anticipatory Guidance - hospital, city, culture
Psychosocial Assessment

- Adapted from SW department current PSA
- Modified for unique needs of international patient population

- See Appendix 1
Orient to Hospital

- Where do I go for clinic/surgery?
- Where is the cafeteria?
- Where are the bathrooms?
- Where are the parent lounges?
- Physical tour and/or written information
Community Connections

- Gather information in PSA
- Places of worship?
- Restaurants? Grocery Stores?
- Local agencies/organizations?
- Assist them with building a support network
Anticipatory Guidance

- What is Columbus, OH like?
  - Weather
  - Public Transportation
  - Safety

- What can I expect of the medical team?
  - Same physician or rotating schedule?
  - Best ways to communicate?
  - Inclusion in care

- What can I expect of the hospital setting?
  - Can I eat, sleep, bathe, etc. in my child’s hospital room?
  - Is there somewhere to do laundry, get coffee, smoke, etc.?
Process Model

- Why have a process?
  - Thoroughly assess requests from clinical-psychosocial-economic perspective
  - Effectively facilitate and track inquiries, assessment logistics
  - Align expectations
    - Patient examples
Process Model (continued)

- What is the process?
  1. Family initiates contact with hospital
  2. Welcome Center (concierge service) connects with family to gather medical records, create MRN
  3. Welcome Center forwards information to appropriate physician, SW, clinical representative
  4. Physician reviews record and accepts, denies, more information; provides plan of care
Process Model (continued)

- What is the process? (continued)
  5. Welcome Center builds financial quote
  6. Welcome Center coordinates conference call with family, SW, clinical representative; Call led by SW
    - Complete Psychosocial Assessment at this time
  7. Summary of call document in EMR, send to international patient advisory board
  8. If approved by board, Welcome Center communicates decision to family
Process Model (continued)

- What is the process? (continued)
  9. Welcome Center sends LOA, assists with payment facilitation
  10. When signed LOA received, family receives appointment date
  11. Family completes payment
Process Model (continued)

- What is the process? (continued)
  12. SW provides family with community cultural resources
  13. Welcome Center assist with accommodation logistics and medical visa letter
  14. SW meets family in clinic/on unit shortly after arrival for ongoing needs
Positive Family Feedback

- “You made me feel like more than a business transaction” – Father from Kuwait
- “You helped give us a clear idea of what to expect while [our child] was admitted” – Mother from Russia
- “My family’s needs mattered to you” – Mother from the Netherlands
- “You took time to know me and my family. You helped me psychologically and that is so important” – Grandfather from Saudi Arabia
Growth Opportunities

- “You require many steps in the beginning such as a doctor’s approval and a phone call. Other hospitals gave us an appointment time faster” - Father from UAE
- “It would have been nice to know more about the neighborhood around the hospital before committing to housing” - Father from China
- “Can we provide translated medical records and discharge summaries to international families?” - NCH Physician
Community Cultural Liaison Pilot

• Program overview:
  • NCH staff matched with international families to assist with culturally specific resources, volunteer
  • Connections specific to family’s religious, spiritual, language, and/or ethnic preferences
  • Provide peer support
  • Report concerns or unmet needs to International Social Worker

• Steps to become CCL:
  • Application with references
  • Orientation
CCL Pilot Continued

- Steps to become CCL:
  - Application with references
  - Orientation

- Boundaries:
  - All NCH staff boundaries
  - Confidentiality
  - Social Media
  - Safety - transportation, in home, babysitting
  - No dual medical interpreting role
CCL Feedback

• From family:
  • “You provided personalized service. I would recommend your hospital to anyone.”
  • “We chose NCH because you provided us with so many way to communicate in Spanish, including a liaison to help outside of the hospital.”

• From CCL:
  • Safety suggestions
  • Family centered care involvement
  • Rounding medical team
Resources

- Culture Vision- [www.crculturevision.com](http://www.crculturevision.com)
- U.S. Department of State, Visas- [http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/general/frequently-asked-questions/what-is-a-u-s-visa.html](http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/general/frequently-asked-questions/what-is-a-u-s-visa.html)
- Hospital Legal Services Department
References
