Understanding Factors that Influence Pregnant and Parenting Teenagers to Seek Medical Care for Themselves and Their Children in the Emergency Room versus with their Primary Care Providers

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**INTRODUCTION**

- Emergency room (ER) overuse is an increasingly important topic for healthcare systems in light of high costs and a shortage of primary care providers (PCPs).
- Teen Living Program (TLP) is a resident shelter in Worcester for pregnant and parenting teenagers. These teens have reported frequent use of the ER.
- Little is known about what factors influence patients to visit the emergency room, and no studies have focused on adolescents.
- We hypothesized that they seek medical care at the ER instead of their PCPs because of convenience, cost, and trust.

**METHODS**

- **DESIGN**
  - Two focus groups
  - Semi-structured interview guide
  - Digitally recorded
  - Transcribed verbatim

- **PARTICIPANTS (N=10)**
  - Recruited from TLP
  - Age: 17 to 21 years
  - Gender: Female
  - Race/Ethnicity: 40% White, 20% Black, 20% Hispanic, 10% Multiracial, 10% other

- **ANALYSIS**
  - Data categorized using qualitative content analysis techniques
  - Transcripts coded by 1 investigator, through which major themes were identified and exemplary quotes selected

**RESULTS**

### Positive Perceptions of Providers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Exemplary Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trust</strong></td>
<td>“Like I would give them my 100% trust but once I found out that you did something that I can’t trust you no more you lost my complete trust because I feel like he’s gonna be a doctor, you have to trust em.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Respect</strong></td>
<td>“To have a physician that actually shows that they actually care and when they walk in the room they’re like oh how are you? Last time that you said you were how’s college? Like they know about you, that’s when I’m more comfortable. …That’s a good doctor.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
<td>“Like no, I like a doctor that gets it done. Like they say they’re gonna do it, they’re gonna do it and it’s gonna be done right then and there.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Negative Perceptions of Providers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Exemplary Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Respect</strong></td>
<td>“But my doctor now, she – she’ll come in, real quick, 5 seconds, she’s done. Like no! Sit down and listen to what I have to tell you and get to know what I’m tryin to say.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Incorrect medical advice</strong></td>
<td>“I was so mad so then I followed up with the doctor 2 days after and he was like I’m so sorry about that and I was like yeah? Well I’m not comin to you no more. I’m finding another doctor.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inconsistent Providers</strong></td>
<td>“I had a doctor but my doctor was so booked all the time that I always had to see another doctor and I hated that.”</td>
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</table>

**Process of seeking Medical Care**

| Visit vs. Call | “My son when he’s not feeling good – once that I see that it’s like one hundred I run to the emergency room. And that only happened twice and it’s really not that serious. I just get scared.” |
| **Family**     | “I don’t wanna wait a half hour for somebody to call me back. I wanna go as soon as possible to make sure that if he’s sick like whatever he has gets like better quick or whatever. I don’t know.” |

**IMPLICATIONS**

- Efforts are needed to help adolescents understand the process of where to go for medical care.
- Providers and the medical system also should be aware of the value of trust in choosing medical care and develop strategies to improve trust with patients.

**LIMITATIONS**

- Small sample size
- Findings may not be generalizable

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**SUMMARY**

Choice is predominantly influenced by positive personal relationships and negative experiences. Participants largely based their decisions on trust and convenience, as opposed to cost, since they all have comprehensive insurance.

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**Figure 1: Pros and Cons of ER vs. PCP**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pro PCP</th>
<th>Pro ER</th>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Con PCP</th>
<th>Con ER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Back up doctors. No available appointments. Because they give you a different doctor. Take forever to wait. Not available when you need them.</td>
<td>Germs. Longer wait. Takes forever, less personal, billing. They don’t know your history. A lot of people, dirty, not knowing the doctors.</td>
</tr>
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