

March 2024

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Student-Run Free Clinic Services for an Underserved Urban Patient Population

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Recommended Citation

Sitto, Mina; Nelson, Adlai; Ma, Sara L.; Kazyak, Sara; Modi, Nili; Lu, Kathy; Wind, Alexander; Schmidt, Jennifer; and Sherwin, Robert, "Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Student-Run Free Clinic Services for an Underserved Urban Patient Population" (2024). *Medical Student Research Symposium*. 364.
https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/som_srs/364

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Background:

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted healthcare delivery in high density urban communities. This clinic provides free medical care to patients in an urban Midwestern community including limited prescriptions, vaccines, and over-the-counter medications. This study aims to understand how the patient demographics and medical services offered at the clinic have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods:

Walk-in student-run clinics were held weekly on Saturday mornings in an urban Midwestern city, with patients consisting of underinsured and uninsured residents experiencing housing instability. Number of returning and new patients, physicals, flu shots, blood glucose readings, HbA1c, lipid panels, and referrals were collected by student coordinators and recorded by year (2019-2020 vs 2021-2022). Comparisons were made using paired two-tailed t-tests.

Results:

A total of 274 and 293 patients were seen between 2019-2020 and 2021-2022, respectively. Preliminary results demonstrate the number of patients significantly varied from December to February ($p < 0.05$). Number of physicals and the number of blood glucose tests in 2021-2022 significantly differ from those of 2019-2020 ($p < 0.05$). Number of Covid-19 vaccines significantly differed between these two time periods ($p < 0.01$), while the number of flu shots did not.

Conclusion:

Patients at walk-in clinics rely on free, interdisciplinary services to obtain healthcare services, medications, and vaccines. Patients during the 2021-2022 year became more vigilant about their health, reflected by the increase in total physicals and increase in total patients. The clinic's improved pre-screening of patients' overall health aims to diagnose individuals earlier, expedite essential medication provision, and reduce the frequency of patient visits.