

Lessons Learned: Implementation of a Social Drivers of Health (SDOH) Screener at a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC)

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Background: The Protocol for Responding and Assessing Patients' Assets, Risks, and Experiences (PRAPARE) was developed in 2014 to better address barriers patients face when seeking healthcare. By accounting for factors beyond medical acuity, PRAPARE enables healthcare systems to understand the communities they serve and promote equitable care. As a standardized screening tool, it provides insight into patients' lived contexts, allowing providers to tailor interventions accordingly.

Methods: Patients' social determinants of health (SDOH) were assessed using PRAPARE, which includes 17 required and 4 optional questions, totaling 21. This tool evaluates healthcare access and quality, education, economic stability, geographic location, and social/community support. Based on patients' responses, they received brochures with relevant resources and guidance on accessing support services.

Discussion: Implementation revealed both successes and challenges. The tool facilitated more open dialogue between patients and providers, enhanced provider awareness of community-specific needs, and supported the delivery of targeted resource referrals. However, the process also presented difficulties, including time constraints, resource limitations, and initial staff hesitation. Lessons learned from this implementation emphasize the importance of intentional planning, consistent team engagement, and advocacy for infrastructure to support social needs interventions. As FQHCs face rising patient demand and growing SDOH complexity, integrated screening tools like PRAPARE can play a pivotal role in advancing health equity.

Conclusion: As chronic illnesses become more prevalent and the aging population grows, Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and the American Safety Net System will face increasing patient loads. Ongoing evaluation and policy development are essential to sustain these efforts and ensure responsive, community-centered care. Expanding funding, strengthening community partnerships, and refining SDOH-focused initiatives will be critical in ensuring sustainable and equitable healthcare access.