

Bridging the Gaps to Care: Medical Students as Patient Navigators

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Abstract

Patients with limited access to care and experiencing socioeconomic disadvantages, lack of insurance, transportation instability, low health literacy face substantial structural obstacles in navigating the healthcare system. These barriers often result in delayed care, missed appointments, increased emergency department utilization, and poorer health outcomes. Despite increasing recognition of social drivers of health, many healthcare systems lack structured, longitudinal support models that guide patients through the complexities of our healthcare systems.

The Patient Navigation Collaborative's (PNC) purpose is to reduce structural barriers to healthcare access for medically and socially complex patients while training future physicians in equity-centered, systems-informed care. The program's primary goal is to improve care continuity, social aid, and patient confidence in navigating the healthcare system through longitudinal accompaniment delivered by trained medical student navigators under physician supervision. As the newest branch of LSU School of Medicine's student run community clinics, PNC provides structured training and supervised experiential learning for medical students.

PNC has recently trained their first cohort of first- and second-year medical student volunteers for patient navigation. We have enrolled over 60 patients into our program for longitudinal assistance and helped connect more to other resources. Our goal is to continue expansion of our services to reach more of our target population and to provide thorough training and experience for future cohorts of medical students.