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A Comprehensive Approach to Supporting Homeless Communities through Free Clinical Screenings

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Abstract

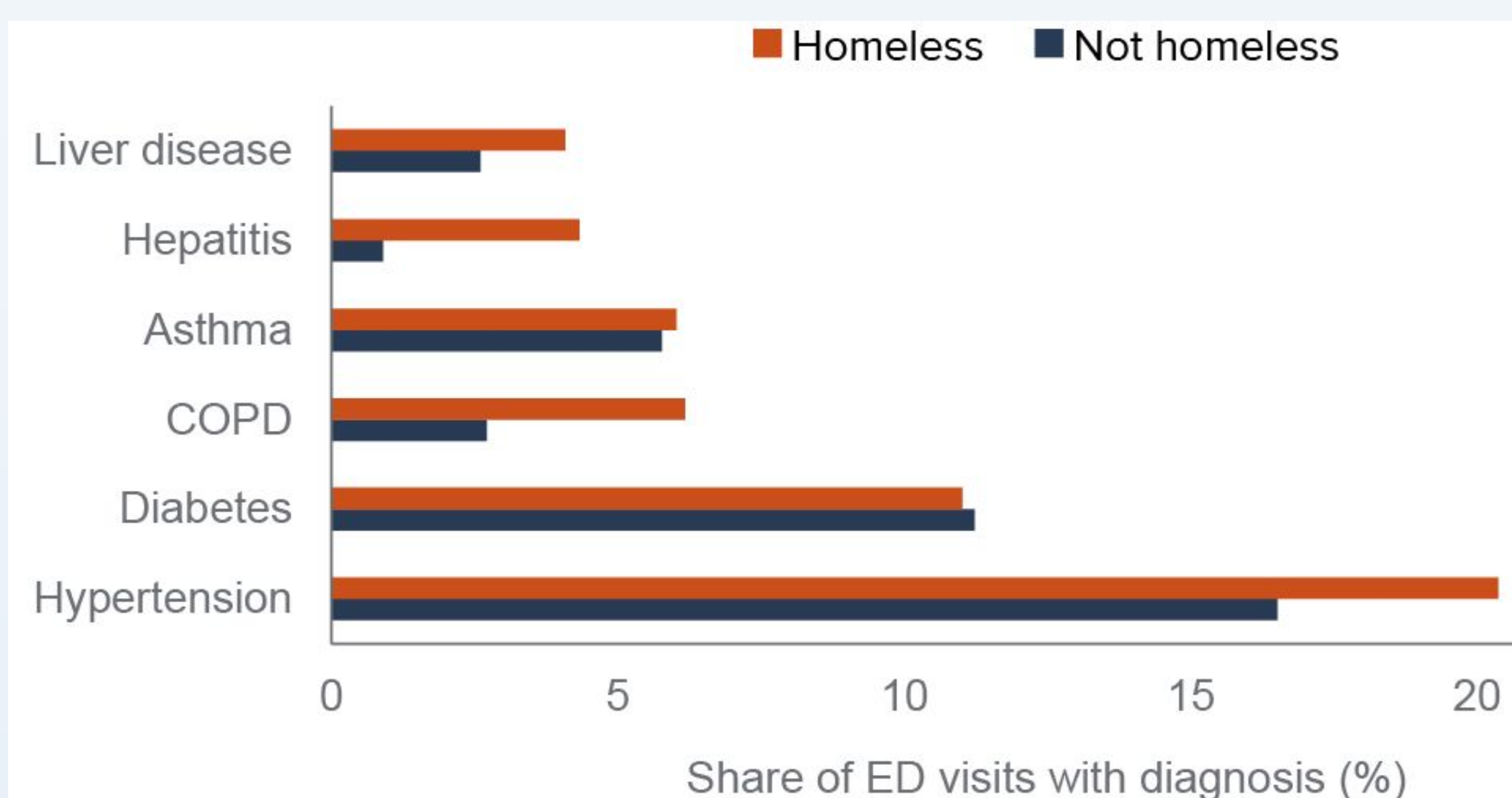
Hearts for the Homeless Orlando is a part of an international organization that is “focused on eliminating health disparities through practicing preventative healthcare and providing free healthcare services.” At each event, free heart health and eye health screenings and education are given to the homeless population in Downtown Orlando. Once arriving at the screening location (Christian Service Center), a table is set up with 2 blood pressure monitors, the KardiaMobile EKG Monitor, hand sanitizing wipes, germicidal wipes, gloves, and pamphlet handouts. These supplies help volunteers understand the health conditions of the individuals who visit to the site, and allow volunteers to recommend them to nearby free health clinics to further check up on them. H4H has worked with the Mothers and Children’s Health Association to host donation drives, as well as with Service and Love Together to provide mobile showering for the homeless population.

Course Connection

In this class we frequently discuss the importance of healthcare communication. Often, people with the greatest health burden have the least access to information, communication technologies, healthcare, and supporting social services. This includes homeless people, who are more susceptible to hypertension, diabetes, COPD, asthma, and hepatitis, among other disorders. This is especially unfortunate as the homeless community has the least access to health care and has poor health literacy. Hearts for the Homeless puts great focus on this disparity and it is one of the issues we try to combat on site. Not only do we provide free blood pressure and EKG screenings, but we also hand out pamphlets that contain information on maintaining a healthy heart, such as foods to avoid and the importance of exercise, and also locations of nearby free health clinics. These are directly intended to help educate the homeless community and reduce the large disparity in health literacy. While communicating, we also make sure to enunciate carefully, repeat if necessary, and write down the blood pressure and EKG reading numbers, all of which are lessons we discussed in class. Additionally, the Social Change Model discusses the importance of citizenship as a community value, which is something we demonstrate by volunteering and giving our time to contribute basic care to those in our community.

Community Impact

As the people have been made aware of certain health issues they found at the screenings, they were able to take the necessary steps to combat these issues. For example, a woman learned that she had high blood pressure at a screening, and immediately went to a free health clinic recommended by the organization. She was then able to receive the proper treatment, and she continues to monitor her blood pressure to ensure that it stays in the normal range. This type of impact can be seen across the populations that the organization serves. Furthermore, another individual was dealing with chest pains and had an extremely high blood pressure reading. An ambulance was called to the scene, and the man received care urgently, saving his life. The work of this organization can be seen to protect the lives of homeless individuals who lack adequate access to healthcare. By educating the public, the organization is providing preventative care to the communities. The homeless populations are becoming knowledgeable in how to maintain their health, improving their quality of life.



Reflection

As a group who has had the privilege of access to healthcare, this is an issue that we did not truly understand. However, after working with H4H we were able to understand the immense difficulties that a lack of adequate access to healthcare can cause. We understood how essential it is for everyone to receive access to the tools they need to lead a healthy life. This could be seen by how the lives of the homeless population were changed once they received blood pressure and eye screenings. This emphasized to us the importance of our actions, and how to us it may seem like a small activity, but can make a life changing impact on others. Furthermore, through working with this organization we realized the value of having such organizations in our communities. These populations benefit greatly from the resources these organizations provide, improving their lives and prospects of a better future. This urges us to continue volunteer work with such organizations, especially Hearts for Homeless, so that we may continue to make a difference in the lives of others. We were also exposed to the realities of volunteer work and the idea that not everyone wants help, even if offered. We learned that while we may be willing to give, not everyone is willing to receive. This is vital to understand in order to respect the wishes of the population.

Civic Responsibility

Volunteering is incredibly important and beneficial, not only for the community that is served, but especially for the individual contributing their time. Giving back without expectation keeps one humble and grateful, while also allowing one to contribute to a cause without an extrinsic reward or cause motivating them. It also allows one to gain valuable skills and confidence in professional and causal settings, regardless of what the task performed is. As pre-med students at UCF, volunteering with Hearts for the Homeless allowed us to gain valuable experience with a diverse range of patients. Not only were we able to contribute back to our local community, but we also had the opportunity to provide basic care without any extrinsic motivation or cause. This is what healthcare and volunteering are about at their very core: providing care and serving our local community. Being able to interact with so many different people and witnessing their reactions, which ranged from extreme gratitude to instant dismissal, was eye-opening and taught us important lessons about how to communicate with different people. Additionally, volunteering locally demonstrated the needs and disparities our community has and how even our small, once a week, contribution can make a difference. This experience was incredibly rewarding and taught us many valuable lessons about the importance of giving back to your community, effective communication, and the needs that exist locally.

References

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