
U.S. Immigrants' Deportation Fears Hurting Healthcare



In the U.S., healthcare providers serving immigrant communities worry that chronic conditions will worsen and infectious diseases will go untreated in their areas. The reason: immigrant patients avoid going to health clinics for fear of being apprehended and deported by federal authorities.

That's how the Trump administration's more aggressive policy of detaining and deporting undocumented immigrants is impacting healthcare. Some clinic leaders say they frequently discuss whether heightened patient fears about immigration enforcement are hurting care and how to address these fears with colleagues. However, they have no good solutions other than emphasising to patients that no information will be shared with immigration authorities.

"In talking to our member centres, they're seeing more appointments being cancelled, and they're asking the same questions you are asking," said Jose Camacho, executive director of the Texas Association of Community Health Centers.

Some clinics and hospital EDs are considering posting signs to help convince immigrant patients that they are protected from immigration enforcement while they are in these healthcare settings. But some experts aren't sure that's helpful.

"I think bringing attention to the issue actually incites fears, because some patients may not have thought of it before," said Dr. A. Scott McNeal, chief medical officer of Delaware Valley Community Health in Philadelphia.

Puentes de Salud, a free clinic in Philadelphia, caters to mostly Latino patients. Since the beginning of the year, more patients have raised questions about immigration issues and how they can be prepared for raids, according to the clinic's administrator, Carlos Pascual. The clinic now has a lawyer available to advise patients on these issues.

At San Francisco General Hospital, one girl recently arrived at the emergency department complaining of abdominal pain. The ED staff examined the patient and results indicated that her symptoms were related to her intense worries about her parents being deported.

"This president's rhetoric is having a negative impact on patient care," said Dr. Robert Rodriguez, a professor of emergency medicine at the University of California, San Francisco. A 2013 study he co-authored found that 12 percent of undocumented Latino immigrant patients at two California hospitals expressed fear they would be discovered and deported by coming to the hospital.

"They don't really understand that we don't report patients and that they are safe in coming to the emergency room," Dr. Rodriguez said.

Current Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) policy "directs agency personnel to avoid conducting enforcement activities at sensitive locations unless they have prior approval from an appropriate supervisory official or in the event of exigent circumstances," explained Dani Bennett, an ICE spokeswoman.

For some experts, that policy provides the agency some flexibility in where it can conduct raids. And official policy pronouncements likely will do little to quell word-of-mouth alarms spread in frightened immigrant communities, the experts said.

Source: [Modern Healthcare](#)

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