



Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Gainesville Community from the

Perspectives of Healthcare Key Stakeholders

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing health disparities and barriers within vulnerable groups in Gainesville. According to the FDOH Bureau of Community Health Assessment, 21.2% of the population of Gainesville is rural, which is significantly higher than the 8.8% of Florida's population. Community stakeholders play a vital role in maintenance of local community health through their intimate knowledge of local groups and resources. This study aims to assess perspectives of these individuals, which are valuable for larger institutions to craft real-time community-based solutions to aid residents in response to barriers that have worsened during the pandemic.

OBJECTIVES

- Construct a collective narrative of how local healthcare organizations and leaders in Gainesville, Florida have adapted to serving vulnerable groups during the pandemic.
- Identify major Gainesville health concerns, needs, and barriers during the pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

SAMPLING STRATEGY: Stakeholders representing various components of healthcare including dental/oral health, mental health, and medical care were recruited via email. Only those that responded and followed up with the investigators were interviewed.

INTERVIEWS: were conducted over Zoom with questions about community health needs, resources, barriers in health information dissemination, and recommendations. This sub-study focuses on the ten key stakeholders interviewed from the healthcare sector. Informed consent for recording was obtained prior to each interview.

DATA ANALYSIS: Interviews were transcribed via Otter.ai software and edited for accuracy. A constant comparative method was used with NVivo 12 to extract themes and sub-themes both deductively and inductively from each transcript. Certain themes were created *a priori*. Final coding was compiled and analyzed using NVivo 12.

DATA & ANALYSIS

COVID-19's Impacts on Healthcare Key Stakeholders

Sub-Themes	Key Stakeholders N = 10 (%)
Continuation of Current Services	7 (70%)
Less Patients Receiving Care and Medical Services	4 (40%)
COVID-19 Testing Referrals	2 (20%)
More Safety Protocols	3 (30%)
Transition to Virtual Platforms	3 (30%)
Less In-Person Clients and Services	5 (50%)

Most referenced nodes pertaining to questions assessing impacts of the pandemic on Gainesville Healthcare Key Stakeholders and organizations.

COVID-19's Impacts on Community Members

Sub-Themes	Key Stakeholders N = 10 (%)
Inability to Work	3 (30%)
Difficulty Knowing and Accessing Resources	3 (30%)
Mental Health Issues	2 (20%)
Difficulty Accessing Care	1 (10%)
Technological Limitations	7 (70%)

Most referenced nodes pertaining to questions assessing impacts of the pandemic on Gainesville community members.

COVID-19's Impacts on Healthcare Key Stakeholders

Sub-Themes	Quotes
Continuation of Current Services	"We [...] are open for all primary care services so that's preventive care like immunizations cervical cancer screening things like that that we normally do well visits like physicals, and then sick visits as well."
Less Patients Receiving Care	"Issues that we face these days are essentially patients not being able to come to clinic visits or have access to online portals or some way to get to the Web."
COVID-19 Testing Referrals	"We are referring all patients that need COVID testing to the Alachua County Health Department, but we help with triage and verify that they are appropriate candidates for that testing."
More Safety Protocols	"To ensure the safety of our patients and our staff [...] we've been tested for the coronavirus [...] and we're going to be implementing temperature checks, using higher level PPE, [...] seeing one patient at a time."
Transition to Virtual Platforms	"We shifted to doing a lot of medical care by telemedicine, which we had not done before, to save people from having to come into the office."
Less In-Person Clients & Services	"We did stop elective procedures, as was directed to by the state. So that decreased the number of patients."

Featured quotes from Gainesville Healthcare Key Stakeholders regarding the impacts of the pandemic on their organizations and work.

DISCUSSION

- According to the FDOH Bureau of Community Health Assessment, common health issues in Gainesville include sexually transmitted infections, food insecurity, poverty, obesity, dental problems, infant mortality, and alcohol abuse
- Gainesville healthcare key stakeholders identified similar needs and expressed concerns with barriers to access, including changes to infrastructure of healthcare services as a result of the pandemic.
 - Telehealth improves accessibility for some but excludes a significant proportion of the elderly, low-income, and non-English-speaking residents.
 - Financial hardship, especially homelessness and joblessness, have increased, decreasing utilization of healthcare resources.
- Key Informants discussed the centralization of resources as a strategy to aid underserved individuals.
 - An example of this is collaboration between healthcare providers and social assistance organizations.

CONCLUSION

- Social assistance measures that address root-issues like poverty/homelessness will translate to large returns for public health.
- Equitable innovation in technology will be critical to improving public health in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Future directions will include analyzing the COVID-induced difficulties faced by the Gainesville community from non-health related sectors.
- Findings contribute to deeper understanding of connections between changes in accessibility barriers and community health needs during COVID-19. This knowledge can be used for policy change and interorganizational collaborations in the Gainesville community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by the College of Public Health and Health Professions at the University of Florida and the Institutional Review Board. The authors would like to thank contraCOVID national and the contraCOVID Gainesville volunteers.

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