Community Resource Connection for Pediatric Caregivers with Unmet Social Needs: A Qualitative Study

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Pediatric health systems are increasingly screening caregivers for unmet social needs. However, it remains unclear how best to connect families with unmet needs to available and appropriate community resources. We aimed to explore caregivers' perceived barriers to and facilitators of community resource connection. We conducted semi-structured interviews with caregivers of pediatric patients admitted to one inpatient unit of an academic quaternary care children's hospital. All caregivers who screened positive for one or more unmet social needs on a tablet-based screener were invited to participate in an interview. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded by two independent coders using content analysis, resolving discrepancies by consensus. Interviews continued until thematic saturation was achieved. We interviewed 28 of 31 eligible caregivers. Four primary themes emerged. First, caregivers of children with complex chronic conditions felt that competing priorities related to their children's medical care often made it more challenging to establish connection with resources. Second, caregivers cited burdensome application and enrollment processes as a barrier to resource connection. Third, caregivers expressed a preference for geographically tailored, web-based resources, rather than paper resources. Lastly, caregivers expressed a desire for ongoing longitudinal support in establishing and maintaining connections with community resources after their child's hospital discharge. Pediatric caregivers with unmet social needs reported competing priorities and burdensome application processes as barriers to resource connection. Electronic resources can help caregivers identify locally available services, but longitudinal supports may also be needed to ensure caregivers can establish and maintain linkages with these services.

Journal:

Academic Pediatrics
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