Group Well Child Care

INFUSING TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES INTO PRIMARY CARE

Dyadic Care in Dorchester, MA

For many moms at Codman Square Health Center, going to the doctor is the highlight of their month. While this may sound unusual to those of us who consider a physical just another item to check off our to-do lists, these moms are coming in for something special—group well child care. These visits bring moms and their babies together during the critical and often challenging first year of their child’s life and, through this shared experience, help them build social support systems and form lasting bonds with each other.

Many group patients live in Boston’s low-income neighborhoods and are dealing with serious life adversities such as food insecurity, homelessness, and violence. When traumatic circumstances like these are experienced on a chronic, day-to-day basis, it is known as toxic stress.

During their group visits, providers at the health center were continually hearing their parents ask for better ways to manage stress and be more supportive parents. In response to this need, the Maternal Child Health team at Codman Square joined in collaboration with the Vital Village Network over three years ago to explore ways to enhance parental resilience and protective factors for families facing ongoing adversities and toxic stress in group well-child care.

Enhanced Well Child Curriculum

Spearheading current efforts is Lauren Graber, MD, a Family Medicine physician, Vital Village Emerging Leader, and Kraft Fellow in Community Health Leadership. During her last year of residency, Lauren worked on a project to introduce trauma-informed participatory learning activities into the group well-child visits focusing on three areas—attachment, play and toxic stress—and design a trauma-informed group curriculum with support from Maternal and Child Health Director Sanam Rodger, MD, and Vital Village Network Director Renee Boynton-Jarrett, MD, ScD. In October 2014, the first iteration of the curriculum was rolled out to group providers and Lauren trained the group facilitators before each group.

Since the introduction of the new curriculum, Vital Village Network Health Outreach & Evaluation Coordinator, Morgan Brockington, has been observing all of the visits, tracking the use of learning activities, and hosting debrief sessions with the group care teams to evaluate the success of incorporation. As part of this iterative process, the team also engaged moms in three focus groups to gather feedback on ways to enhance group care and the trauma-informed curriculum pieces. Using the feedback and data gathered, reflective changes were made to the curriculum and a second iteration was rolled out to providers in May 2015.

Iterative Learning Process

The team has continued to train providers, make observations, and gather feedback after each session. In June of 2015 they established a parent advisory committee consisting of 10 former group patients that meets on a monthly basis to discuss ways that the health center can better support parents and offer feedback on the curriculum changes. This group meets monthly and offers moms a chance to be empowered in the design and improvement process for theirs and their child’s health care.

In October 2015, Dr. Graber presented the focus group findings at the Family Medicine Education Consortium Annual Meeting in Boston, MA, and the American Public Health Association Annual Meeting in Chicago, IL. She and a member of the parent advisory group co-presented findings at the Vital Village Network 2015 Leadership Summit. Interest in this work has spread and the curriculum has been shared both locally and nationally.