



Improving Access to Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening for Low-income Women at a Free Clinic

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Background & Objective

Low income women who do not have health insurance are at risk for receiving inadequate preventive care, including cancer screening. One reason for not being screened may be fear of receiving a medical bill they are unable to pay. We sought to determine whether women receiving medical care by volunteer providers in a Free Clinic setting are accessing the Maine Breast and Cervical Health Program (MBCHP), which provides coverage for Pap tests and mammograms for women who are low income in Maine, to improve access to screening for cervical and breast cancer.

Methods

We completed a retrospective chart review of all 73 adult women aged 40-66 who visited the Portland Community Free Clinic at least once between June 2017 and August 2018. To qualify for care at this Clinic, patients had to have an income less than 250% of the federal poverty level have no other insurance, and be stably housed. We anticipated that the majority of these women would qualify for the MBCHP. Two research interns (MF and DP) carried out chart reviews and data entry, looking for evidence of application and enrollment to the MBCHP, routine physical exam, number of clinic visits, smoking history, and history of a Pap test or mammogram within the prior 3 years (including by self-report). We carried out descriptive statistics on a summary dataset.

Maine Breast & Cervical Health Program

The screenshot shows the website for the Maine CDC Breast and Cervical Health Program (MBCHP). The page includes navigation links, a search bar, and a main content area with the following text:

Maine CDC Breast and Cervical Health Program (MBCHP)

The Maine CDC Breast and Cervical Health Program (MBCHP) is funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) under the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP), and with Maine General Fund dollars. Maine first received CDC funding in the fall of 1994 and began providing early detection services in 1995. The mission of the MBCHP is to provide breast and cervical cancer screening and diagnostic services to underserved women, to provide public and professional education, and to support community partnerships to enhance statewide cancer control activities.

The Maine CDC Breast and Cervical Health Program (MBCHP) is not a Qualified Health Plan, and does not meet the definition of "Minimum Essential Coverage" for required insurance coverage under the Affordable Care Act (ACA).

Printable letter to use if your insurance company requires verification that Maine CDC Breast and Cervical Health Program (MBCHP) does not qualify as insurance.

MBCHP will pay for a breast and/or cervical cancer screening office visit performed at one of our designated network service locations. You will be given options to choose a service location during enrollment or re-enrollment. Your office visit must be performed at the service location you choose during enrollment/re-enrollment AND include one of the following preventive cancer screening services:

- a Clinical Breast Exam and/or;
- a Pelvic exam and/or;
- a Pap test alone or;
- a Pap test and high-risk HPV test (HPV co-testing)

MBCHP will pay for a screening Mammogram (at MBCHP participating Mammography locations).

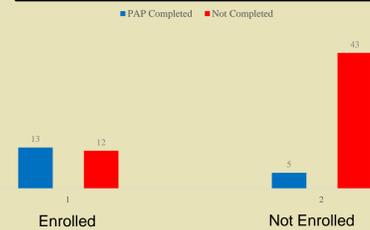
MBCHP also covers limited diagnostic or follow-up services. (see Important Information about Follow-up Testing)

Results

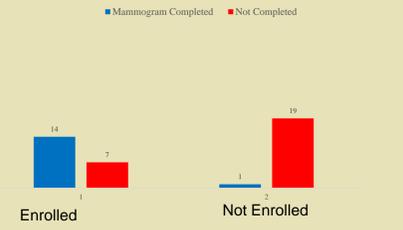
Of the 73 women, the mean age was 52.9 (range 40-66), and 93.2% spoke English as their first language. The women had a range of 1-21 visits during this time period (median=3). We found that 25/73 (34.2%) had applied for the MBCHP, and all of their applications were approved. Pap tests had been completed on 13/25 (52.0%) of the women who enrolled in the MBCHP, and only 5/48 (10.4%) of the women who did not enroll (p=0.0003). Among the women aged 50 and over (N=41), mammograms had been completed on 14/21 who enrolled in MBCHP (66.7%) but only 1/20 (5.0%) women who did not enroll in the program (p=0.0001).

Other characteristics associated with having Pap screening included having a full physical exam at the clinic (13/29 women, 44.8% compared to not having had a full physical 5/44, 11.3%, p=0.0019). We did not find that smoking history was associated with having has a Pap test (7/28 smokers, 25.0% had a Pap vs 11/39 nonsmokers, 28.2%, p=1.0).

PAP TESTS COMPLETED ACCORDING TO ENROLLMENT IN THE MBCHP



MAMMOGRAMS COMPLETED ACCORDING TO ENROLLMENT IN THE MBCHP



Conclusions

Only one third of eligible women in this population applied to the MBCHP, although all that applied were accepted.

Enrollment in the MBCHP was associated with having a Pap test or mammogram. This represents an opportunity to inform patients about the program and help them enroll.

Limitations

We were unable to assess whether women were offered enrollment into the MBCHP but declined to enroll. Some women reported screening that occurred elsewhere (eg, Planned Parenthood) but records were not available to confirm that the screening occurred. We assumed patients were reporting dates correctly. Some women may not enroll in the program because they are not willing to undergo screening.

Next Steps

We plan to create a handout for volunteer reception desk staff to hand to patients at check-in about the program. This will be a low-literacy handout aimed at educating women about the MBCHP and about breast and cervical cancer screening.

We also plan to create signage for the examination rooms to make patients aware of the program, and to update the physical exam form to include a checkbox referring patients to the program, so that volunteer providers remember this resource.

About Us

The Portland Community Free Clinic (PCFC) provides healthcare to at no cost to uninsured adults aged 18-65 who live in Southern Maine, primarily in Cumberland and York counties.

It is a partnership of community volunteers, supported by the Public Health Division, Department of Health and Human Services, City of Portland Maine.

The PCFC refers patients to Mercy Hospital and Maine Medical Center for additional services as needed, including follow-up of abnormal screening tests. Patients diagnosed with cancer in this setting typically have received emergency MaineCare to cover treatment.



Volunteer Research Interns
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References

- <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/population-health/bcp/>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp/screenings.htm>
- <https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org>