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On the Road Towards Greater Mental Healthcare

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On the Road Towards Greater Mental Health

Biography:

Saira Husain is a sophomore President's Scholar from Southlake, TX majoring in biology and anthropology and minoring in Spanish. She plans to pursue an M.D. and is keeping her options open to the world of medicine.



Jasia Mahdi is a junior President's Scholar from Carrollton, TX, majoring in biochemistry and history. She plans to pursue an M.D./Ph.D. in neuroscience and a career in pediatric neurology with a focus on autism research.



Problem:

Major depressive disorder is one of the most pressing issues in today's society. For years, depression was deemed false and even now, in many societies and neighborhoods such as Vickery Meadows, it carries a negative stigma that prevents many people suffering with depression from seeking treatment for the disease. Mental illnesses are diseases that result from chemical imbalances that regulate how a person thinks and feels. While brain diseases such as depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder are as common as heart disease, they continue to be the some of the most misunderstood of all illnesses.

One of the greatest problems Vickery Meadows faces is the high rate of mental illness, particularly depression. A neighborhood of high-density apartment complexes,

Vickery Meadows is a lower socioeconomic immigrant community home to many immigrants and refugees. In 1993, the Vickery Meadow Improvement District was established to provide special supplemental services, public safety, security, and other facilities. Now, Vickery Meadows has a number of community partners committed to helping the neighborhood resolve many issues faced by its residents. In terms of health-care, currently the Parkland Clinic, Healing Hands, and a variety of other free or low cost clinics make their services available to the residents. Yet, despite this plethora of resources, depression is a pressing issue that has gone untreated, and thus continues to plague many of the residents, and one that also continues to escalate in the area. Texas Health Presbyterian has conducted research showing that high levels of depression exist in many areas of lower socioeconomic status, and Vickery Meadows's residents in particular have a 51% greater risk for mental health disorders such as depression. Accordingly, we hope to help treat those suffering from mental health disorders in Vickery Meadows in order to improve their health and lives.

Proposed Solution and Partners:

In coordination with the Vickery Meadows community outreach program, LifeNet, a mental health care provider, a group of psychiatrists from the DFW-metroplex who have volunteered their time, Fair Oaks Youth and Family Center, and Healing Hands, a local basic health provider, we plan on establishing a mental health clinic that will provide screening, referral, and treatment for patients suffering from various mental health disorders including depression.

LifeNet uses a holistic, three-pronged approach that seeks to heal the person, and it is such an approach that we hope to extend and expand upon in Vickery Meadows.

Currently, LifeNet has treated various groups of people in the Pebbles unit of Vickery Meadows; we would like to collaborate with them to reach out to a larger group of people. Correspondingly, LifeNet has agreed to help us focus on extending greater mental health treatment to the neighborhood's residents through a free clinic.

As part of its treatment methodology, LifeNet assesses patients' symptoms and needs to systematically develop treatment plans. If a patient is unable to pay for mental health services, LifeNet enrolls them in a publicly and privately funded program called NorthSTAR, which then enables them to seek mental health services at a variety of service-providers throughout the city of Dallas. Our plan is to incorporate LifeNet's infrastructure into our free mental health clinic in order to optimize the available treatment options to Vickery Meadows residents. We will limit our services to patients with depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder, as these are the disorders that are covered by LifeNet and NorthSTAR. We will refer those patients who fall outside these categories to Parkland Hospital, Green Oaks, or Healing Hands.

Additionally, we will work in close partnership with Fair Oaks Youth and Family Center, an organization that provides low cost/ free health services for children enrolled in Dallas Independent School District (DISD). Although they have a counselor and a psychiatrist on site to provide children with necessary treatment, many parents and adults suffer from mental illnesses and are untreated. Accordingly, they will refer patients to our initiative. Furthermore, Fair Oaks Community Center has given us permission to use their clinic once a month at no cost, and will allow us to use their network to set up a phone line that patients can use to contact the clinic.

Proposed Methodology:

Through a two-pronged initiative we plan on establishing a mental-health clinic in Vickery Meadows that will screen and treat residents eligible for LifeNet through LifeNet services and that will provide free psychiatric services to those who are ineligible as well.

LifeNet has agreed to help treat Vickery Meadows residents who face schizophrenia, major depression, bipolar disorder, or schizoaffective disorder. While some will be able to be treated through LifeNet due to their financial and mental statuses, many will not fit into this category as a large portion of the patients will be seeking out treatment for milder mental disorders such as mild depression, anxiety disorders, hyperactivity: ADD, ADHD, and anger. However, such patients will then seek out treatment in our free mental health clinic.

We will first screen patients to see if they are eligible for NorthSTAR; therefore, for LifeNet. This thirty-minute process will consist of filling out information on a resident's economic status along with a psychiatric evaluation that will then be faxed to NorthSTAR where eligibility will be determined.

Initially, we anticipate having three psychiatrists present for four hours once a month. As the program grows, we plan to add on more psychiatrists and enroll more patients. Those who are eligible for NorthSTAR will be able to meet with our volunteer psychiatrists on a monthly basis and will receive the needed medications from LifeNet. The psychiatrists will go through a short training as to how to deal with LifeNet's paperwork. Case managers will also be assigned to deal with rehabilitative services and check in with patients in order to make sure there is no drug abuse and to help patients acquire the skills they need to live their daily lives.

As part of our two-pronged initiative, Vickery Meadows residents who are ineligible will also be able to meet with our volunteer psychiatrists at the same location and seek out treatment for their mental illnesses. Initially, a psychiatric evaluation will be conducted by the psychiatrist, which will take between 45-60 minutes. Follow-up psychiatric evaluations thereafter will take approximately 15-20 minutes. Psychiatric medications will be provided via samples from our volunteer psychiatrists and via donations by pharmaceutical companies. Walmart boasts a \$4 per month prescription program in which we will encourage our psychiatrists to prescribe from; however, at times, the medications needed will not be on the list and will subsequently have to be covered by other means.

In total, three groups of residents will be treated at our clinic: those undergoing screening, those eligible for LifeNet, and those ineligible for LifeNet. These three groups will return monthly for a check-up along with a refill of the necessary psychotropic medications. Each month we will follow up with previous residents and will also screen and register new residents.

Future Plans:

As our program expands we plan to enroll more residents and increase the number of volunteer psychiatrists available to provide treatment. Additionally, we would like to extend our outreach program to the children of those inflicted with mental disorders as children are often greatly affected by their parents' illness. We plan to accomplish this by creating a mentoring system comprised of SMU students or by holding group counseling sessions with Masters students in Psychology.

Time Line:

March 8-14: Print pamphlets and advertise the clinic through both referrals and flyers in the neighborhood and the local community

March 14-31: Hold an open house where we will screen and register residents for NorthSTAR

April 1: Open the clinic for treatment

May 6: Provide follow up for residents already enrolled and continue to enroll new residents (we will continue with this once a month)

Oct/Nov: Advertise at the Health Fair in Vickery Meadows in order to increase outreach

Budget:

Supplies	\$1300
File Cabinet with Lock	
Fax	
Paper	
PR pamphlets	
Certificates of Appreciation	
Transportation (Gas)	\$200
Medications	\$2500
*Translator/ Case Manager	\$1000
\$20/ hour (4 hours a month)	

* Two volunteers a month will be needed to enroll residents and to help with recording, filing, and faxing information to complete LifeNet enrollment procedures. Additionally, a case manager will be present on site at each monthly session to check for pressing needs that may be of issue. Due to the diverse population present at Vickery Meadows, volunteer translators trained in basic medical linguistics may be needed. We will also hire translators for other, more obscure refugee languages (e.g., Boutenese).

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