Challenges with Rural Health

Living in a rural community there are many challenges people encounter when trying to get proper healthcare. A number of these challenges coincide with a limited number of providers in the area and not having the access or financial means to get the medical resources. Many of these patients are not getting the most effective care because preventative healthcare services are lacking in their rural area.

A rural healthcare clinic often has a shortage of physicians, dentists, and other healthcare professionals; leading to these professionals having no time for new patients and being over-worked with already established patients. A way to increase the amount of healthcare professions is to encourage them to practice and work in rural areas. For example, at the Michigan State Medical School they implemented a rural physician program where students are encouraged to practice medicine in rural areas. Programs such as this one, need to be expanded into other healthcare schools all throughout Michigan. These programs, within a couple of years, would increase the number of rural healthcare professionals, which in turn would increase the number of patients having the access to preventative healthcare because more doctors and dentists would have the opportunity to see more people in the community.

Another challenge people in rural areas face is transportation. In rural areas, there are a limited amount of healthcare facilities and usually clinics are located in the nearest rural city. A majority of people in these areas live in the country and must travel a long distance to their healthcare clinics. Rural areas have a lower socioeconomic status due to limited job opportunities compared to urban areas. Because of the lack of money, some people in rural communities do not own a car or have a way to get transported to medical centers. One up and coming way to overcome this challenge is through telemedicine to communicate with patients over electronic devices. Telemedicine has become increasingly popular over the last few years and it is especially more implemented when Covid-19 shut down many patient and physician face-to-face practices. Telemedicine makes it easier for people that have access to the internet, who live far from the healthcare facilities to be able to meet-up with their healthcare providers more frequently. An idea for people that do not have internet resources available at their household, would be to set-up an area in every local township where people can go to have appointments through telemedicine with their primary care provider.

Even though these are only a couple of the challenges presented with preventative care in rural areas, if these ideas were implemented, rural healthcare would become more accessible to people. This would ultimately improve the overall health and well-being of the people in rural communities.