

Uninsured can't access specialty services

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A U.S. study suggested uninsured patients at community health centers often encounter problems when seeking specialty services outside such centers.

Harvard Medical School Associate Professor Bruce Landon and colleagues determined Medicaid patients also face such obstacles, although to a lesser extent, while insured/Medicare patients have a far easier time accessing needed services.

"Often times, people think that community health centers act as a kind of safety net for the uninsured but these findings present a far more problematic picture," said the study's lead author, research fellow Nakela Cook.

Landon said community health centers work well for primary care services provided on site.

"The breakdown," he said, "occurs when an uninsured patient needs to see a specialist or needs some sort of high-tech service or to be admitted to a hospital."

U.S. community health centers serve approximately 15 million people, most of whom have low incomes and either lack insurance or rely on programs such as Medicaid.

The study is reported in the journal Health Affairs.

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