

Cultural navigation services keep patients healthy & feeling supported after they leave the hospital



Recently discharged patients can recover more easily knowing they have food in the fridge, medications filled, and supplies for their newborns, thanks to the new partnership between UCHHealth and Project SHINE.

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by Ella Meyer, *Project SHINE* intern, Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning

Coming home from the hospital with five new medications, all with different instructions for how much to take and what time of day to take them, would be difficult for anyone to navigate. But for Mohib, this task has an added layer of difficulty. Mohib and his family resettled in Denver in 2019 and he exclusively speaks Rohingya and never had the opportunity to learn to read. With medical information most readily available in English, he faced major barriers to understanding the complex set of instructions for his new medications.

However, Mohib wasn't alone in this challenge for long. In reviewing various patient's discharge notes, cultural navigator Joan Nelson, RN, ANP, DNP, recognized that the long list of medications Mohib had been discharged with meant his needs stretched beyond his hospital stay. Working with UCHHealth social workers, Joan was able to connect with Mohib, and over multiple days and hours on FaceTime, helped him feel confident about sorting his pills and knowing when to take them.



With an improved understanding of his needs and increased health literacy, Mohib was able to recover more quickly and with more peace of mind. The

services Mohib received were made possible by a partnership between [University of Colorado Hospital](#) and [Project SHINE](#), a program of [Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning](#). Since 2013, Project SHINE has been providing patient and resource navigation and health literacy support to refugees and immigrants living in Denver and Arapahoe County. The COVID crisis presented a new, urgent opportunity for collaboration with UCHHealth.

Though patients have been able to access a wide array of life-saving resources through the UCHHealth/Project SHINE partnership, the greatest asset of all has been the team itself. A powerhouse of medically-trained navigators and



cultural experts from Project SHINE work together with UCH social workers and nursing students to reach families in the communities where they live, rather than only inside hospitals and clinics. Project SHINE's strong network of community housing partners, religious leaders, social service providers and other community resources enables the team to act quickly to provide culturally appropriate,

comprehensive family care. Through home visits, nursing students have the unique opportunity to see into the lives of patients and assess needs that go beyond what might be listed on a form.

"We had a very positive experience with the cultural navigator and nursing student we worked with -- we haven't had people in this field treat us as equals or with so much respect in some time," recalls a family from Southeast Aurora.

Joan gives special credit to the team's commitment to holistic care. "Each patient is part of a broader system, and you can't treat a part without looking at the whole," she explains. This approach has been crucial to helping patients recover faster and get back to an independent, dignified life. "The hospital can do an amazing job bringing people back from the brink," Joan says, "but the patient can still get discharged to a place with an eviction notice on their door." Rental assistance, food stamps, in-home care, pill boxes to organize medication, oxygen delivery, and bus passes are just some of the resources that patients identify as being instrumental to their good health.

"You all are beautiful people for helping me with my daughters. If we didn't have the heaters you all provided, we would not be able to take the cold. Today we are going to be able to sleep well because of all your help," says one Spanish-speaking mother who returned from the hospital to a home without heat.

The program fundamentally addresses the social determinants of health, so the hospital expects to see fewer patient readmissions and emergency room visits and better adherence to primary care follow-up visits. The program's community-based approach has been a particular strongpoint in ensuring patients are supported in the long-term and reviews from patients reflect this uplifting effect. As one COVID patient experiencing homelessness vowed, "When I'm in a better place, I want to come back and help, too."

The tremendous success of UCHHealth and Project SHINE's partnership has led to the expansion of the program beyond the original focus on COVID-19 patients to now include those in other branches of medicine such as obstetrics, oncology, and neurology. The team looks forward to continuing to promote linguistically accessible and culturally competent care supporting patients as they overcome health challenges and achieve lasting wellbeing.

Note: Names have been changed to protect patient privacy

For more information on this cultural navigation program, contact Brandy Kramer, Senior Manager for Project SHINE: bkramer@springinstitute.org