

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to answer the question: what are the pathways by which culturally competent health care affects the quality and utilization of health care among the medically underserved (in this particular case, Asian Americans in the Boston area)? This question arose during my internship experience during the summer of 2006 at South Cove Community Health Center in Chinatown, Boston, MA.

This thesis provides background on South Cove (and my time spent there). Chapter 2 describes the problem that community health centers seek to address, the relevant policies concerning community health centers, as well as background on the community in which South Cove is situated. Chapters 3 and 4 present the research, a series of qualitative interviews with South Cove patients, staff, and providers, and analysis, including revised theoretical models explaining the effects of cultural competency. Chapter 5 synthesizes the analysis from the research and provides an evaluation of and policy suggestions for South Cove, for similar community health centers, and for the national community health center program. It also provides suggestions for future avenues of research and rubrics for measuring cultural competency.

The most significant findings was that location, especially in the case of South Cove Community Health Center, is an extremely important consideration. With the Asian American community in Boston being as localized and tightly-knit as it is, becoming an integral part of the community is critical. Almost all of the patients interviewed were referred to South Cove by friends and/or family members, and the rest found it because they live within very close proximity.