Caring for Children in Foster Care: The Challenges and How to Overcome Them

Carla Parkin-Joseph, MD, FAAP
Clinical Instructor, Child Protection Team

Disclosure

• I have no financial disclosures.

Objectives

• Recognize the myriad medical, developmental, mental health, and behavioral conditions frequently identified in children in foster care
• List potential barriers to comprehensive health care for children in foster care
• Recognize that collaboration between the health care and child welfare systems is key!

Case: Jeremy’s Medicine

• Jeremy – 8-year-old boy
• New patient
• Placed into foster care 6 weeks ago with Ms. Brown
• Per Ms. Brown:
  – No known medical problems
  – “Bag full of inhalers”
  – No known allergies

• Per Jeremy:
  – Allergic to shellfish
  – Once hospitalized after exposure
  – Should have “some pen-type medicine”

Health at Entry to Foster Care

• Many children enter the foster care system with pre-existing conditions
• Toxic stress in early childhood has been associated with poor health outcomes
• The American Academy of Pediatrics has classified these children as having special health care needs

Case: Jeremy’s Medicine

Health at Entry to Foster Care
Health at Entry to Foster Care

- 30-80% of children in foster care enter with a health problem
- 35-45% have a chronic or untreated medical condition

Health Conditions

- Medical
- Developmental
- Mental

Medical Conditions

- Growth Abnormalities

Medical Conditions

- Dermatologic
  - Eczema / Atopic Dermatitis
- Allergic
  - Asthma
  - Food allergies
- Preventative Care Screening
  - Lead Poisoning
  - Iron deficiency Anemia

Developmental Disorders

- Language Disorders
- Poor social-adaptive skills
- Delayed fine motor skills
- Educational Disorders
- Learning disabilities
- Behavioral disorders
- Limited cognitive ability

Developmental Disorders

- Many developmental issues identified in these children are a direct result of childhood trauma, which has altered brain development
Mental Health Conditions

- Up to 95% of children enter care with a mental health/behavioral health condition
- Common problems include:
  - ADHD
  - ODD
  - Conduct Disorder
  - Anxiety
  - Depression
  - PTSD
  - Disruptive behavior

Mental Health Conditions

- Children in foster care receive psychotropic medications 3 times more often and for longer duration
- Higher rates of polypharmacy

Guidelines for Use of Psychotropic Drugs

- After a mental health evaluation and trauma assessment by mental health expert
- Specific condition, start at lowest dose, and titrate slowly
- Other mental health treatments
  - Involve all caregivers in treatment plan
  - Avoid polypharmacy

Recommended Schedules

- Not only is each visit more in-depth, but frequency of visits is usually more often

Schedule of Preventative Care Visits

- Non-Foster Youth
  - 3-5 days (Newborn)
  - 2-4 weeks
  - 6 months
  - 9 months
  - 12 months
  - 15 months
  - 18 months
  - 24 months
  - 30 months
  - 3 years
  - Then once a year, every year!

- Foster Youth
  - 3 months
  - 6 months
  - 21 months
  - Then twice a year, every year!
  - Admission Health Screen
  - Comprehensive Health Assessment
  - Follow-up Health Visit
  - With placement changes
  - With reunification

Aspects of Well Child Care
Schedule of Preventative Visits

- Non-Foster Youth
  - 3-5 days (Newborn)
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Schedule of Health Care Visits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of Child</th>
<th>Timing or Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admission health screen</td>
<td>Ideally within 48 h of placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive health assessment</td>
<td>Within 30 d of entry to foster care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up health visit</td>
<td>30-60 d after entry to foster care</td>
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</tbody>
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Admission Health Screen

- Anthropometric measurements
  - Including head circumference up to 3 years
- Be vigilant for signs of maltreatment
- Assess and treat communicable diseases
- Brief developmental screen
- Mental health screening

Comprehensive Health Assessment

- Health information gathering
- Physical exam
- Immunizations
- Laboratory Screenings
- Anticipatory Guidance
- Safety
- Adaptation to foster care
- Developmental/Educational evaluations
- Mental Health evaluations

Follow-Up Visits

- Identify health issues in interim
- Review additional health history
- Update immunizations
- Review findings from referrals/evaluations
- Monitor “goodness of fit” to foster home
- Monitor child’s adjustment
- Review anticipatory guidance
- Determine appropriate interval follow-up

The Pediatrician’s Role

- Remain vigilant for maltreatment
- Refer for additional evaluations
- Provide trauma-specific anticipatory guidance for caregivers
- Frequent and open communication with caregivers and other involved professionals, especially the case worker
The Medical Home

- High-quality
- Comprehensive
- Coordinated
- Continuous
- Compassionate
- Culturally competent
- Trauma informed
- Family centered
- Child focused

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Barriers to Care: Foster Youth and Caregivers

- Lack of health information
- Poor access to care
- Health insurance coverage
- Legal consent remains with biological parents

Consent for Health Care

- Biological parents often retain decision-making capacity and right to consent to treatment
- General medical consent
  - Does not cover:
    - Mental health evaluations
    - Prescription of psychotropic drugs
    - Surgery
    - Chemotherapy

Special Considerations in Consent

- Medical or Mental Health emergencies
- HIV Testing
- Adolescents
  - Reproductive Health Care
  - Family Planning
  - Abortion
  - Mental health care
  - Substance use treatment

Barriers to Care: Systems

- Lack of systems to share information
- Lack of funding
Barriers to Care: Physicians

- Resource shortages
- Time constraints
- Missing Data
- Lack of continuity of care
- Lack of training

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Healthy Foster Care America

- An effective health system is a COORDINATED health system
- Recognize a common mission
- Learn each other’s languages
- Develop communication and information-sharing systems
- Develop coordinated systems of care

Children and young people in out-of-home care: are GPs ready and willing to provide comprehensive health assessments for this vulnerable group?

Susan M. Webster and Meredith Temple-Smith

- Professionalism/Values
- Patient focus
- Competence
- Capacity
- Knowledge/Information Management
- Financing
Medical Directors in Child Welfare

- Medical expertise
  - Expert consultation on medically complex cases
  - Consultation on clinical reviews
- Leadership
  - Oversight of the agency’s health services
  - Liaison to health community
- Example: Baltimore’s MATCH Program

Nurses in Child Welfare

- Help to identify medical needs
- Can help to triage urgency of need for medical services
- Care coordination, management of medical concerns
- Can help summarize and explain medical needs
- Monitor needs over time

Foster Care Health Clinics

- Goals
  - Prompt comprehensive evaluations early
  - Establish a medical home (PCP)
  - Reduce Emergency Department visits/Hospitalizations
  - Make earlier connections to specialty services
  - Aid child’s transition to foster care
  - Help foster parents adjust to unique health care needs of children

Foster Care Health Clinics

- Models
  - Evaluation/Consultation
  - Medical Home
  - Preferred Provider
  - Nurse Coordinator
  - Mental Health/Development based
  - Special Needs/Multidisciplinary

Evaluation/Consultation

- Advantages
  - Standardized evaluation
  - Access to foster health expertise
  - Impact high number of children
- Disadvantages
  - Inadequate follow-up
  - May not establish a medical home
  - Poor chronic disease management

Medical Home

- Advantages
  - Consistent care over time and placements
  - More complete health records
  - Chronic disease management
- Disadvantages
  - Limited number of children to be served
  - Geographic proximity to placement
  - Can disrupt existing relationships between caregivers and PCPs
### Preferred Provider

**Advantages**
- Foster health trained providers
- Larger geographic area served
- Collaboration between providers for complex health conditions

**Disadvantages**
- Limited choices for caregivers
- Variance between providers
- Requires high level of coordination

### Nurse Coordinator

**Advantages**
- Convenience of home visitation
- Extra supervision of home and caregivers
- Less expensive model

**Disadvantages**
- Limited evaluation in home setting
- Lack of access to ancillary services
- May not establish primary care

### Mental Health/Development Based

**Advantages**
- Addresses important mental health and/or developmental concerns, common in foster children
- Access to mental health/development expertise
- Provide specialty care over time

**Disadvantages**
- More expensive and time-consuming model
- Limited number of children can be served
- Not all children will need the same level of care

### Special Needs/Multidisciplinary

**Advantages**
- Access to specialized expertise in foster care children with special health care needs
- Coordination of care for children with social and medical risks
- Consistent care over time and placements

**Disadvantages**
- More expensive and time-consuming model
- Limited number of children can be served
- Not all children will need the same level of care

### Foster Care Clinic Examples

- Rochester: Starlight Pediatrics
- Cincinnati: CHECK Program
- Illinois: HealthWorks

### Care for Foster Children at Michigan Medicine

- Development of a clinic to specifically address the special health care needs of foster youth
- Evaluation/Consultation Model
- Plan to offer 2 half-days of clinic with one physician with CAP background

- Stay Tuned! More to Come!
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Ms. Brown asks for help managing Jeremy’s asthma and food allergies

You wonder:
- Why was Jeremy removed without information on the most basic health information?
- What other health screening for other health problems is recommended?
- How can you ensure that Jeremy’s health information travels with him no matter where he goes?

Resources

- AAP’s Trauma Guide: Helping Foster and Adoptive Families Cope with Trauma
- Healthy Foster Care America
- CHOP Clinical Pathway – Foster Care, Medical Evaluation
- Your institution’s Social Workers and Legal Counsel

References

Thank you!
Questions?