

The Multicultural Health Navigator (MHN) Experience

A typical day

- Guide and enable patients to navigate the Canadian healthcare system by providing them with the required tools
- Help patients get the services they need
- Schedule appointments
- Follow-up with patients and service providers
- Prepare for and conduct education sessions
- Communicate and network with other organizations
- Build a personal relationship with other service providers
- Complete paperwork (in-office)
- Receive and make phone calls
- Respond to patient’s inquiries (via voicemail, email etc.)
- Attend biweekly training sessions for professional development
- Outreach to the community: attend events and programs to talk about the MHN program
- Debrief with fellow MHNs on a weekly basis

“We listen. We discuss. We advocate.” – MHN

Challenges in navigation

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| <p>Self-advocacy and readiness for change</p> | <p>Teaching patients to self-advocate for themselves:</p> <p><i>“...sometimes people don’t want to learn 10 thousand different things, even if it’s good for them, sometimes they only want to learn one.”</i></p> <p><i>“As navigators, we empower clients to identify their challenges and support them to advocate for themselves. Sometimes we have to take a step back and say ‘this is not my fight...but whenever the clients are ready to fight for themselves, I am ready.”</i></p> |
| <p>Missing information</p> | <p>There are instances when a service provider does not have the patient’s information on file resulting in delays or repeated appointments with the navigator.</p> |
| <p>Information overload</p> | <p>A lot of community events, resources and information are available; this can sometimes feel overwhelming.</p> |
| <p>MHN’s role and responsibilities within the patient-provider relationship</p> | <p>Providers are sometimes unaware of a Multicultural Health Navigator’s role.</p> |
| <p>Transportation is a challenge for patients</p> | <p>One of the biggest challenges for patients is using the bus system.</p> <p><i>“As a newcomer it is hard to access services that are half an hour from your house because you don’t even know which bus to take.”</i></p> <p>One way to overcome this barrier is to accompany patients on the bus and identify landmarks that can be used to remember a bus stop.</p> |

A memorable client

A Multicultural Health Navigator visited a family after receiving a referral from a social worker. The mother and father did not speak English and were not acquainted with the Canadian healthcare system. The family was referred to the MHN program because they were missing many of their appointments with service providers. Both the mother and father had cellphones but had not set up their voicemail, and as a result missed many messages from their doctor's office. The MHN set up the clients' voicemails and spent approximately half an hour to walk them through the process of how to use and access this system:

“One of the things I taught them how to do is...I translated the sentence “please call again and leave a message” into Arabic characters. I told them if you get a phone call you don't understand, just tell them this statement and then the calling party will record a voicemail. Give it [the voice mail] to any of your trusted friends, family, neighbours and they will be able to tell you the content.”

“It's as simple as this. It's the ability of listening to them, not judging, and looking at the core of the issue.”

This story highlights how the MHN used a person-centred approach to identify a significant challenge to communication with the primary care provider and help the patient to overcome this barrier.