



Global Health Perspective / Opinion

Immigrant and Refugee Trauma-Informed Prehospital Care: Education Model for Culturally Responsive Care

By Sarah Cornell, BS, EMT-P

I have six years of prehospital care experience but, until recently, was not aware of the unique history, needs, and experiences of immigrants and refugees in Milwaukee. As a graduate student in MCW's Master of Science in Global Health Equity, I took a course on *Health and Forced Migration*. After interviewing an Iraqi refugee for a course project, I began to understand the risk of retraumatization during a healthcare emergency. I decided to survey my colleagues, emergency medical services (EMS) providers in Milwaukee to assess our cultural awareness and collective awareness of trauma-informed care.

Immigrant and refugee populations in North America bring with them traditionally based explanatory models of disease that influence healthcare interactions. Fire and EMS protect communities by leveraging awareness, educational, and prevention opportunities. Language differences, socioeconomic circumstances, religious values, and cultural practices may present barriers to the delivery of quality care in the prehospital setting. Increasing cultural competence has been cited as part of the solution to reduce health care disparities and can enhance character and an ability to care for a diverse patient population.

The lack of interpreters, unfamiliarity with trauma-informed care, and absence of prior training about the history and cultural practices of immigrant and refugee families creates an opportunity for high-impact. From August 1st to August 12th, 2021, an anonymous survey was administered and completed by thirty-four EMS providers in the Milwaukee area. The results of a needs assessment of first responders related to trauma-informed care and migrant awareness indicated a need for education and tools to help reduce re-traumatization.

First responders reported positive attitudes toward migrants and a need for additional education in migrant healthcare. Use of this survey will inform curriculum development for first responders in Wisconsin. Online learning modules designed to target bias and increase provider cultural humility can be effective tools to educate first responders. First responders in

Milwaukee are open to online, asynchronous learning opportunities that deliver practical tips to address cultural barriers.

A human-centered, Milwaukee-specific distance educational module will tailor trauma-informed care best practices to the prehospital setting and increase provider cultural competency. This model will provide a template for other communities to clinically accommodate their diverse patient population.

The prehospital setting is an environment where cultural sensitivity is particularly needed as high call volume and acuity place the provider under demanding time pressures, yet the prehospital literature on health care disparities and cultural competency is limited. High-quality care delivered in a culturally sensitive manner is the essence of the patient-centered model of medicine. Co-developing educational opportunities with immigrants and refugees for prehospital providers will increase provider and community capacity for cultural responsiveness when interacting with resettled populations, our newest neighbors.

For further self-education:

[Click here](#) to learn more about Trauma-Informed Care.

[Click here](#) to learn more about Refugee Resettle in Wisconsin.

[Here](#) is a free, online short module that provides a foundation in the philosophy, values, and conceptual frameworks of cultural competence and cultural humility as it relates to refugee populations.

Sarah Cornell is a Clinical Research Coordinator in the Department of Neurosurgery at MCW. In December, she will be the first graduate from MCW's Master of Science in Global Health Equity Program. She is a Firefighter/Paramedic and EMS Instructor in Milwaukee County. She has been approved to volunteer at the Fort McCoy Military Base where several thousand Afghan guests are awaiting resettlement.