

Special Video Report Transcript

Headline: Rebecca Onie of Health Leads Discusses Efforts
To Help Patients Access Community Resources

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Rebecca Onie, co-founder and CEO of Health Leads

I'm Rebecca Onie, the co-founder and CEO of Health Leads. Health Leads is a nonprofit organization that was born of conversations that I had with physicians at Boston Medical Center, really asking them, "If you had unlimited resources, what's the one thing you would give your patient?" And they said the same story again and again, which is, "Every day we have kids who come into the clinic; the child has an ear infection; I prescribe antibiotics, but the real issue is there's no food at home or the family is living in a car." And they would say one of two things: "I don't ask the patient about those issues, because there's nothing I can do." You know, they would say, "On those issues, you practice a 'don't-ask-don't-tell' policy." Or they would try to solve those problems for the patient. And we've done a survey recently finding that doctors at Bellevue Hospital spend 9.2 minutes of every 15-minute visit trying to solve patients' basic resource needs.

So Health Leads was born of this challenge. And the model is a simple one. When low-income patients come into the doctor's office, and the physician, nurse, social worker identifies any unmet resource need that will have an impact on the health of the patient -- so access to healthy food, safe housing, heat in the winter -- the provider can prescribe those resources the same way she'd prescribe medication. The patient then takes the prescription to Health Leads' desk in the clinic waiting room. And we now have a core of about a thousand college student advocates in six cities who will work side-by-side with patients to help connect them to the existing landscape of community resources and public benefits.