

Access to pediatric emergency services in South Los Angeles: The effect of a county hospital closure

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BACKGROUND

The community of South Los Angeles, made up in much part by Service Planning Area 6 (SPA 6) had been served by Martin Luther King Jr. Medical Center (MLK) since 1972 following the Watts Riots which signaled a need for healthcare access in the community. South Los Angeles today remains a socio-economically disadvantaged area with 14.6% of children have special Healthcare needs and 17% of the children are uninsured. One-third of the children in SPA 6 live below the federal poverty level and 77% of the population does not own a car.

Following the closure of the hospital and emergency room at MLK in 2007, parents of the more than 700,000 children that were within the hospitals service area were left to find an alternate source for emergency care for their children. This was the seventh emergency department to close since 2004 in the South Los Angeles area. Although access in South Los Angeles has been so critical, there has been little data on the impact of the hospital and ER closure upon children and families that live in South Los Angeles.

OBJECTIVES

- Describe changes in pediatric ER utilization among patients living in South Los Angeles
- Describe barriers to access emergency care in South Los Angeles
- Provide recommendations for policymakers in health service planning

METHODS

Project development

- Partnership and collaborator building
- Community needs assessment
- Community expert interviews (pediatricians of MLK, BOS Representative, CBOs)
- Secondary data analysis ("Impacted Hospital" Self-Report, SPA 6 data, OSHPHD and MLK utilization data)

Survey/Questionnaire

- Based on needs assessment and interviews
- Both open ended & mult choice responses

Survey Inclusion

- South LA parents of children 0-18 yrs
- 23 zip codes within MLK service area
- Respondents English/Spanish lang adults
- Recruitment
- In-person and by phone via random dial
- Sample n=60 respondents
- Survey conducted Spring 2008

EXAMPLES OF SURVEY QUESTIONS

- How many times did you take your children to see a doctor urgently or go to an emergency room after August 2007?
- What was the name of the clinic/office/hospital that you went to?
- How many minutes did it take you to arrive to this place for care?
- Since August 2007, did you delay or not get medical care that you thought your child needed?
- For what reasons did you delay?

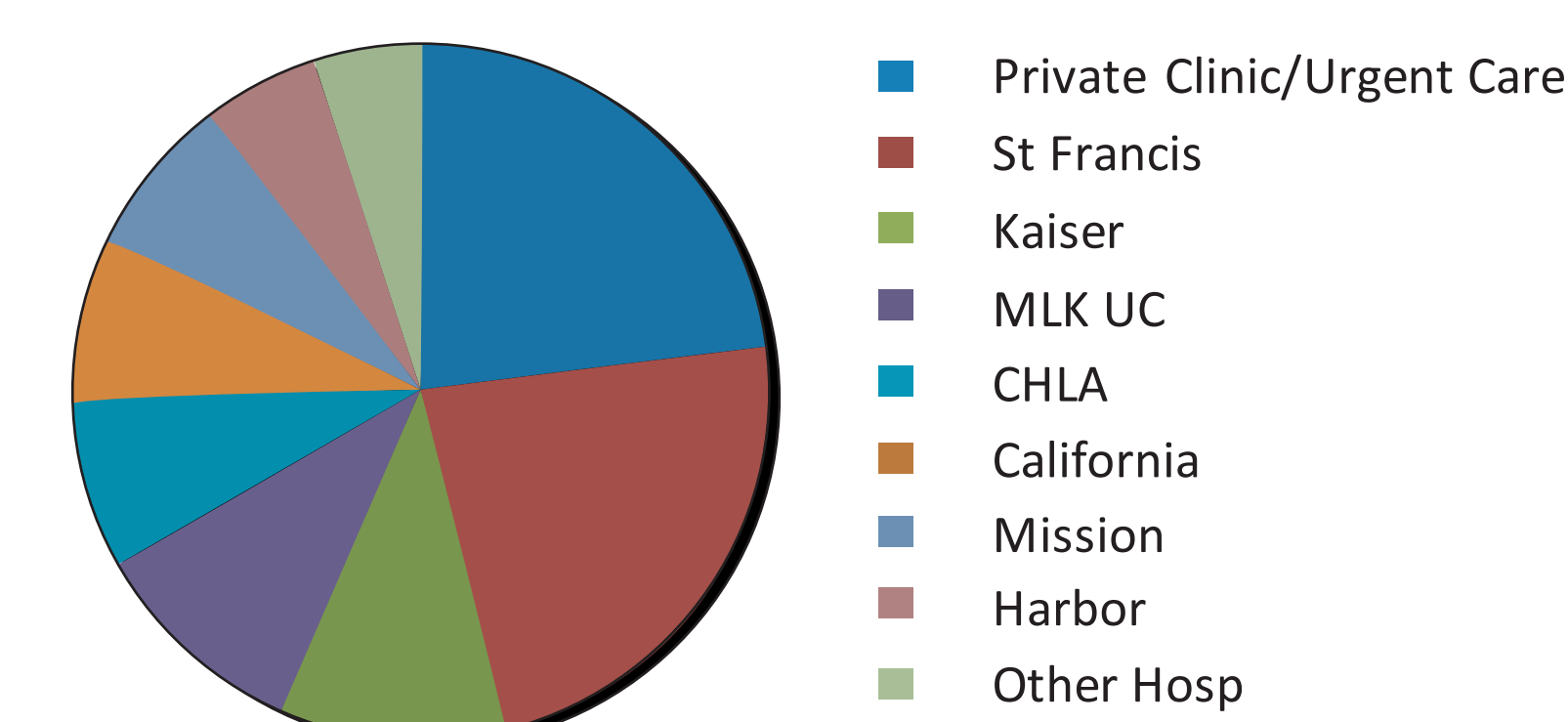
PATIENT EXPERIENCES

"I had used the services in the past every 2 or 3 months because I have 2 daughters who suffer from asthma. They get asthma attacks frequently. MLK Hospital is very close by, only seven minutes from my home... Now I am worried about the next asthma attack my daughters will have ... My daughters will be receiving their medical attention much later."

"In September 2007... My 5 ½ month old daughter had a high fever and it caused her to have a seizure. I called 911. The fire department came... and said they couldn't take her to St. Francis because it was full... my only option was Gardena Memorial Hospital. From the time I called 911... to the hospital – almost an hour had passed. I also used the emergency services when my other daughter was 13 months old and her larynx closed..."

RESULTS

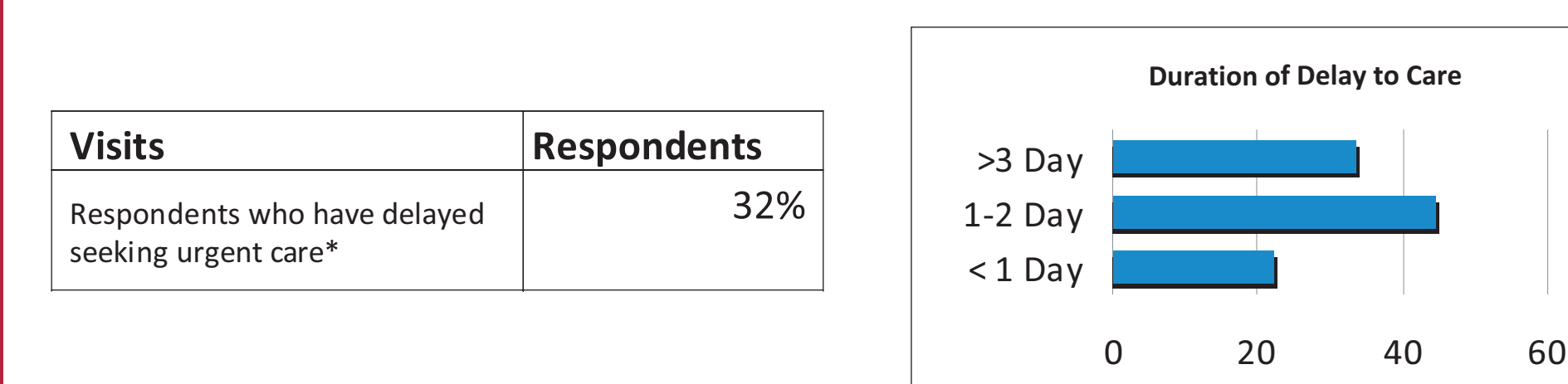
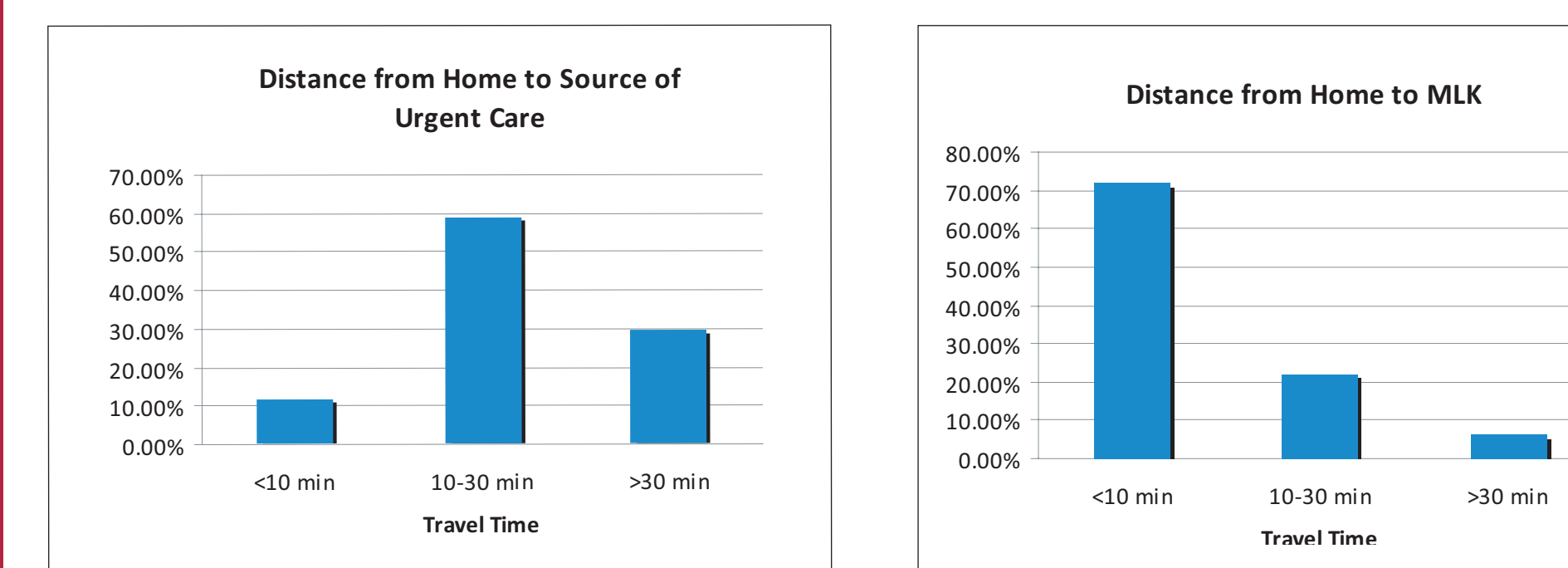
Reported Sources for Pediatric Urgent Care



Source of Care	Utilization*
Private Clinic/Urgent Care	23%
Private Hospital ER	63%
County ER or Urgent Care	13%

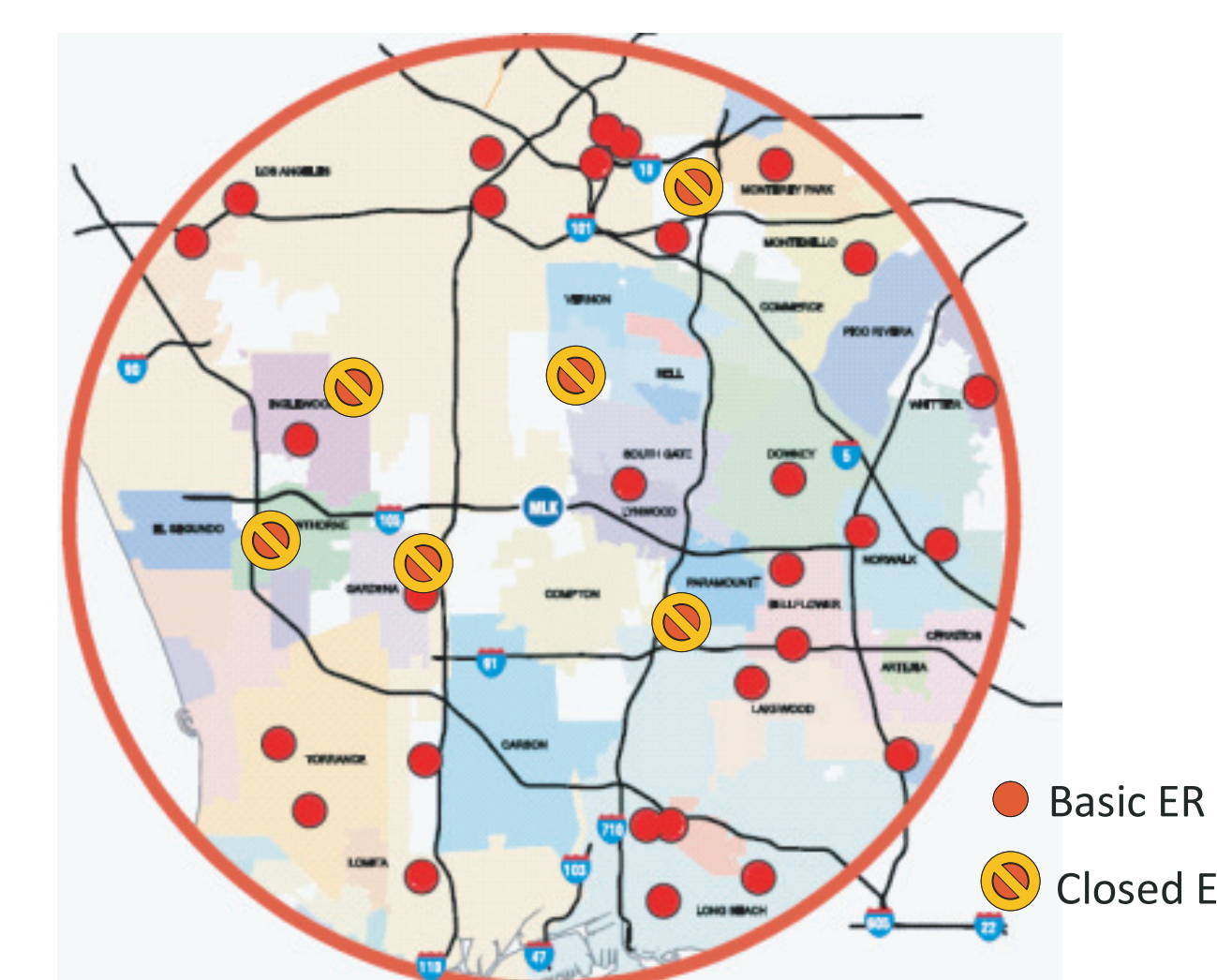
*Represented by the two-thirds of respondents to the survey who have utilized urgent care for their children since closure of MLK ER in August 2007

Barriers to Pediatric Urgent Care in South LA



Survey data collected are preliminary results of 60 survey respondents in an area of a 5 mile radius from MLK. Approximately one-half of respondents are from the three zip codes closest to MLK.

STUDY AREA - 12 MILE RADIUS FROM MLK OF ERs



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Access to pediatric emergency and urgent care in South LA should be improved to:
 - Prevent further overcrowding or closures of impacted ERs
 - Ensure capacity to handle Pediatric-Specific emergency care - Decrease existing travel times and delays in seeking ER care
 - Prevent worsening health outcomes for South LA children
 - Enhance community sense of health safety and entitlement
- Need for pediatric ER services was ranked by nearly all respondents as "Very Important". This should be a top priority for policymakers
- Consideration for a public hospital operator to reopen MLK should be high to enhance the safety-net and to reduce strain on the already fragile private hospital system
- Formation of Children's Healthcare Access Committee for South LA should be made to ensure this remains a priority

REFERENCES

- Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Key Indicators of Health by Service Planning Area
- Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council, Children's Scorecard, 2004
- Office of Statewide Health Planning & Development
- Experiences from Beilenson Declarations from LACNLS
- Please contact below for additional resources

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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