



## Correspondence

## Utilizing health care professionals in community health centers to prevent human trafficking



Dear Editors of *Preventive Medicine*,

Leaders of HEAL Trafficking would like to congratulate Greenbaum et al. on their insightful article in Issue 114, “Multi-level prevention of human trafficking: The role of health care professionals” (Greenbaum et al., 2018). We recognize the public health implications of human trafficking and work diligently every day to mitigate the effects of those impacted. We strongly support the utilization of health care professionals (HCPs) in multi-level prevention of human trafficking and would like to emphasize the impact of HCPs in community health centers (CHCs), the predominant primary care healthcare delivery system for underserved populations.

Because CHCs serve a large portion of the nation's poor and uninsured (27 million patients nationwide), CHCs are uniquely positioned to be the first point of contact for many at-risk and trafficked persons, who are likely members of such vulnerable groups (Chang and Hayashi, 2017). Community health centers demonstrate high levels of cultural competence and understanding of the communities they treat, and thus, the resources and programs CHCs provide are often more effective in caring for trafficked persons than those in other types of health care settings. For example, CHCs utilize a system of care, where personnel exhibit linguistic and cultural concordance with those in the community who experience language barriers, which makes a huge difference in terms of prevention and intervention strategies.

Community health centers are based on the Community Oriented Primary Care (COPC) model, a model of care that integrates primary care with public health approaches. Therefore, not only do HCPs provide primary medical care, but the CHC as a whole engages in education programs, community outreach, and collaboration with other organizations, to address underlying social factors that increase someone's risk of being trafficked, such as housing insecurity and employment. In

this way, HCPs not only have an impact on individual-level prevention and intervention, but at the social and community levels as well (Rothman et al., 2017).

We encourage further investment in community health centers, as they play an integral role in the protection and treatment of at-risk and trafficked persons. By bolstering community health centers, we will be one step closer to eliminating human trafficking and supporting its survivors in the most effective and efficient way we can.

## References

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