

Everyday throughout central Illinois, people have difficulties making ends meet, and are often faced with impossible decisions: Do I buy groceries or pay the utilities? Do I risk foreclosure, or keep my car running in order to get to work?

Because health care can often seem like a major stumbling block for those already struggling, OSF HealthCare leaders, providers and Mission Partners participated in a special workshop Monday in Peoria.

The Cost of Poverty Experience (COPE) is an event that offers participants a glimpse into the lives of low-income individuals and families living in our communities. It is a look into the obstacles that are faced, the decisions that are made, and the consequences that impact these families every day.

OSF HealthCare, in partnership with The Root Cause Coalition, held a COPE event for members of the OSF family.

“It’s very easy to forget what others have to do and go through for things that we take for granted,” said Michelle Carrothers, OSF HealthCare Vice President of Strategic Reimbursement. “This gives you an experience to live that out and then also have understanding of how we can help and assist them maneuver through the system, and things that we can do possibly as we discharge individuals and help them get access or help to other types of services.”

Participants took on a defined role within a family and navigated businesses and agencies that are commonly found in low income neighborhoods or frequently used by a significant portion of low-income individuals.

The resources provide the system dynamic that many low-income individuals have to navigate daily.

Shelley Wiborg, Chief Nursing Officer at OSF HealthCare Saint Luke Medical Center and OSF HealthCare Holy Family Medical Center, played a 20 year old undocumented immigrant who had no English capabilities, adding another layer to her difficulties navigating the system.

“Pretty eye opening. I have not been in this situation, but I tried to use some Spanish that I had learned in high school a long, long time ago and that was very frustrating because nobody understood what I needed.”

The Root Cause Coalition, which works to end health care inequity, says taking a moment to walk in someone else’s shoes, even in a simulated role, can help providers better understand patients and their daily struggles.

“I think it’s important in just the provider sense, if we want to provide care for our patients, and to make the health and well-being of our community better, we need to understand what people are going through,” said Monique Brigham, Manager of Education and Programming for The Root Cause Coalition.

OSF HealthCare is one of two health systems nationwide chosen to participate in the COPE simulation.