

## Care Consultation: Effects on patients with dementia and their caregivers

### FINDINGS FROM THE MARGARET BLENKNER RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF BENJAMIN ROSE

#### Study background

The philosophy of managed care places high value on health information and support services, but economic pressures lead many health care provider organizations to eliminate these nonmedical services. As a result, patients with dementia and their family members often feel abandoned by providers because they do not receive enough information about the disease, treatments, and community services. This lack of information interferes with the effectiveness of treatments for dementia and other coexisting health conditions, and may lead to more costly hospital stays. Some managed care health systems are establishing partnerships with community agencies to provide information and support services at a lower cost than in larger health systems.

The Margaret Blenkner Research Institute of Benjamin Rose gathered interview data from 89 patients with dementia and 157 primary family caregivers to understand the effects of care consultation delivered within an experimental partnership. The partnership was established to improve quality of information and care consultation support services for patients with dementia and their family members.

#### Purpose

To examine outcomes for patients and family caregivers in a partnership between Kaiser Permanente, a managed health care system, and the Cleveland Area Alzheimer's Association, a community agency that provides information and support services.

#### What is care consultation and how does it work?

Care consultation is a telephone intervention in which patients and family caregivers collaborate with a professional, such as a master's prepared licensed social worker, to create an individualized plan of care. It provides families sufficient information and coaching so they are equipped to make their own decisions.

#### Goals

- Conduct a structured initial assessment
- Identify problems or challenges
- Provide information about available community services
- Facilitate discussion about how to best utilize and apply for services
- Develop strategies for using personal, family, and community resources
- Outline specific tasks to be completed, such as using education and training programs, support groups, or a respite reimbursement program

#### Results

##### Patients involved in care consultation had:

- Reduced levels of embarrassment and isolation
- Reduced difficulty coping with memory problems
- Greater benefits when they had more severe memory impairment
- Fewer physician visits
- Reduced likelihood of a hospital admission or emergency department visit
- Increased satisfaction with the health plan
- Decreased depression
- Decreased relationship strain

**Caregivers involved in care consultation had:**

- Significant decrease in depression
- Lower utilization of other services
- Reduced strain in the relationship with patients
- Reduced health deterioration and role captivity when other Association services were used in conjunction with care consultation

**Recommendations****To facilitate positive patient outcomes while reducing costs, organizations can:**

- **Enhance family support.** Establish partnerships between health care providers and disease-specific community agencies to devote more attention to supporting family members who care for a person with a chronic illness. Organizations with a first-hand understanding of specific chronic conditions can provide useful information and services to families, whereas health care providers often have limited time and resources to meet these needs effectively. Information and services not only improve quality of care, but they can also eliminate unnecessary visits to the emergency room and hospital stays, leading to significant cost savings.

**To save money on hospital, physician, and emergency room visits and increase stability of health care membership, policy makers can:**

- **Reimburse care consultation services.** The insurance industry will have an incentive to add care consultation services to their health care plans when these services are reimbursable.

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**For the complete findings, please refer to:**

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Cleveland Alzheimer’s Managed Care Demonstration”

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**Margaret Blenkner Research Institute**

Established in 1961, the Margaret Blenkner Research Institute of Benjamin Rose conducts applied aging research to enhance the lives of older adults and those who care for them. MBRI shares its knowledge with local, national, and international audiences. MBRI’s current program focuses on four major topics: Services and Interventions; Family Caregiving; Quality of Long-Term-Care Services; and Program Evaluation.