

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 for patients, 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.

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

To facilitate positive outcomes for patients with memory loss, professionals can:

- **Provide information** about symptoms, causes, treatments, impact of memory problems on moods and behaviors, and the prevalence of dementia. When care consultants serve as an alternative source of illness-related information, they may reduce the likelihood of physician visits. Accurate and complete information can also reduce feelings of embarrassment and isolation, legitimizing concerns and helping patients recognize they are not alone.
- **Encourage discussion** about memory problems. Enable patients to acknowledge difficulties and feel comfortable talking about them so they do not carry the burden of concealing impairment.
- **Address emotional issues** such as denial, anger, social withdrawal, anxiety and depression.
- **Be proactive** by helping families prepare for changes in roles and responsibilities to smooth those transitions. Work with patients and family members to develop plans if symptoms worsen and additional supervision is needed. Without prior discussion about potential changes, patients may end up in the emergency department or hospital because no alternative arrangements have been made.
- **Plan interactions with physicians** to facilitate more efficient and effective communication (e.g., provide coaching on questions to ask the physician) and help families initiate more timely discussions before problems escalate into crises.
- **Organize an efficient, coordinated network** by enlisting informal support and involvement from family members and friends and connecting families to additional community resources when necessary. An improved support network can reduce social isolation that may cause or exacerbate relationship strain.
- **Offer practical strategies** to compensate for lost cognitive abilities (e.g., simplify daily activities, establish manageable routines, keep a journal) and to deal with difficult symptoms (e.g., distinguish symptoms from intentional negative behaviors).

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For the complete findings, please refer to:

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“Outcomes for patients with dementia from the
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.