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Patient Perspectives of the Doctor-at-Home Service

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Home health care has been established as an effective model for reducing mortality in the elderly. Beyond reducing mortality, many patients prefer receiving health care in the comfort of their homes. The benefits of home health care extend into end-of-life care, with patients reporting greater satisfaction when in-home palliative care is added to the traditional care model. In addition, in-home palliative care has been shown to reduce the costs of terminal medical care by an average of $7,552. The Robert Larner, M.D. College of Medicine at the University of Vermont, 2Community Health Centers of Burlington

Objective: To determine the impact of Dr. Sokol’s Doctor-at-Home Service from the patient’s perspective.

Introduction

Methods

- We conducted a literature review to understand patient attitudes and outcomes associated with at-home health care programs nationally.
- We developed a survey to administer to a cohort of Dr. Sokol’s patients over an 8-week period. The survey addressed topics such as barriers to healthcare, benefits of receiving care at home, and costs associated with doctor-at-home programs.
- We performed a thematic analysis on the responses of 3 survey questions (Question 1, 2, and 5). Following theme analysis, 4 common themes were chosen as focus themes that reflected patient opinions. Focus themes were evaluated for number of responses recorded and compiled into a summary figure with representative patient quotations.
- Survey responses from questions 4, 6, and 9 were used to generate individual figures. An overall satisfaction score was generated using responses from question 10.
- Data summary of patient population was analyzed and included male vs female demographics, age distribution, and spectrum of diseases treated.
- Conclusions were generated by our team following data analysis and interpretation of results.

Results

Physician - Patient Relationship

- "Dr. Sokol feels almost like a relative." 16 of 17 patients reported a 10/10 for patient satisfaction!
- "If I forget something that I wanted to ask her, I have time to remember it during the four-long visit."
- "Home health to me means living better, living longer; talking like I want to, asking what I want to and not being afraid." 5 out of 17 patients reported fewer visits to the emergency room since seeing Dr. Sokol.
- "I had come to err on the side of solitude rather than see a doctor; having her visit me, I need that."
- "We are able to collaborate to make decisions."
- "I feel more relaxed in my own home."


Convenience, quality of care, and a positive relationship with Dr. Sokol were the main reasons why patients sought out the Doctor-at-Home program and/or continue to participate in it. As an alternative to an office-based setting, a majority have chosen at-home care due to comfort, feeling more relaxed, fewer barriers to care, and past negative experiences with in-office care. This information shows that more expansive Doctor-at-Home programs would eliminate barriers and provide quality care to patients, especially those with specific barriers to access. The evidence is compelling that there is a desire and need for an extension of the Doctor-at-Home program to reach more patients or for development of other similar programs in the area.

Barriers to Office-Based Care faced by Patients

- Transportation
- Negative Past Experiences
- No One Size Fits All
- Decreased
- Increased

Limitations

- The small sample size of 18 patients limited our ability to conduct a statistical analysis or generalize results beyond the population surveyed.
- Patients reported estimated out-of-pocket costs, but the cost of the program to their insurance was not determined.
- Several patients had poor cognition, making it difficult to interview them and accurately representing their thoughts and difficulties.
- Without further information, it is difficult to state whether the at-home care prevented injuries or other situations that could lead to preventable visits to the ER.

References