



Hennepin Health

Minneapolis Grain Exchange Building
400 South Fourth Street, Suite 201
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55415

An Award-Winning Program for the Homeless

In 2019, Hennepin Health joined Hennepin Healthcare (Hennepin County Medical Center – HCMC) to implement a quality improvement program for Hennepin Health members who are homeless. An earlier study had shown that homeless people who were admitted to the hospital were more likely to need another hospitalization in the weeks following their discharge. The goal of the quality improvement program was to provide special services for these homeless members during and after their admission so they could stay healthy and not need to be readmitted.

Beginning on January 29, 2019, Hennepin Health proactively screened members for homelessness when they were admitted to the hospital. The initial screening was completed automatically using a tool developed at Hennepin Healthcare. The tool combs through the electronic health record (EHR) looking for certain information, such as a member address corresponding with a shelter, drop-in center or other mail pick-up location, Healthcare for the Homeless clinic visits, use of medical diagnoses codes for homelessness and previous social assessment completed during hospitalization. Summarized information on a patient's housing status was displayed on a list of currently admitted Hennepin Health members to identify potential candidates for care management.

The tool was used by Hennepin Health staff to do an in-depth review of each potential patient candidate using different record systems, as well as health plan clinical records to determine the current state of services and homelessness at the time of the hospital admission.

Members who appeared to be homeless and in need of services were interviewed in the hospital by Hennepin Health care management staff who then completed an in-person assessment of the member and offered outpatient, community-based care management. Patients who agreed to participate in these services were assisted on an ongoing basis by the care manager they met in the hospital. When they left the hospital, the care manager helped them get housing, transportation, help with food and other services. Appreciating that patients experiencing homelessness, especially those struggling with substance use disorder, may experience negative interactions with healthcare systems, the care managers worked very hard to gain the members' trust by helping them find the services the members identified as most needed.

A study was done to evaluate if these care managers could build rapport, provide and promote services and more rapidly connect patients to social services that would keep members healthy and reduce readmissions. The study included a control group of patients who were eligible but declined services or were discharged prior to an inpatient visit by the care manager.

From January 29, 2019, through December 31, 2019, 485 patients were screened for Care Management enrollment; 124 (26%) were eligible for services. Ninety-three of 124 (75%) eligible patients were visited by a Hennepin Health Care Manager while hospitalized. Seventy-two of 93 (74%) visited patients accepted the services. Intervention and control group patients were primarily African/African American and Native American. There were more men than women.

The study showed that readmissions were significantly lower in the group that received care management, showing that these members were better able to manager their health. In fact, no readmissions occurred at all during the first nine months among the group receiving care management. In addition, a significant portion of these members were housed over the course of the year, a feat that commonly takes months to years.

After this study was completed Hennepin Health and Hennepin Healthcare were awarded first place in the 2020 Innovator Awards Program by Healthcare Innovation, a national health magazine. The award noted that the program improved member health and helped to reduce medical costs by preventing unnecessary hospitalizations. Based upon the success of this program, Hennepin Health and Hennepin Healthcare will continue to provide care management services to members experiencing homeless in 2020 and will also expand this service to members who need help with substance use disorder.



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