

Primary care team communication across three care models: perspectives from frequently hospitalized patients

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Problem

- 5% of healthcare users account for 50% of U.S. healthcare spending
- Hospitalization rates contribute to this unequal distribution, driven by patients with multiple, chronic medical conditions and exacerbated by social disadvantage & fragmented health care
- To address the unique challenges of frequently hospitalized patients, the Comprehensive Care Program (CCP) was developed at UCM
- The CCP program aims to lower healthcare costs by reducing hospitalizations & improving outcomes for at-risk patients
- To date, results show 15-20% reduction in hospitalization rates for CCP patients compared to standard care, though still unclear why
- Enhanced provider-patient communication is a potential explanation for CCP effectiveness & possible improvement area in standard care

Goals

- To describe patient perspectives regarding communication with their primary care teams and the impact of this care on their wellbeing
- To compare these patient experiences across three care models, including two comprehensive care programs & a standard care model

Strategy

- The CCP & C4P programs are comprehensive care models that differ from standard care in the following ways: smaller patient panels, PCP provides both inpatient & outpatient care, interprofessional team members (e.g., social workers, nurses, program coordinators)
- C4P adds a CHW, social needs screening, & cultural programming
- This embedded study sought to understand the patient experience in CCP, C4P, and standard care at UCM using qualitative methods
- Patients receiving care from the Primary Care Group and South Shore Senior Center at UCM were considered for the standard care arm

Interview guide

- Positive & negative experiences
- Communication & outreach

Semi-structured interviews

- Eligible if 1+ year in CCP study
- In-person at UCM & by phone

Template analysis

- Deductive and inductive coding
- Sub-analysis on **communication**

Results to Date

- 21 interviews: 7 CCP, 7 C4P, 7 standard care (PCG & South Shore)
- Sample characteristics: mean age 66 years old, 57% female, 91% Black or African American, all had 2+ chronic conditions
- Provider-patient communication in the sample: via MyChart or phone; with PCPs, nurses, social workers, CHWs, and program coordinators; frequency of contact was highly variable

Theme 1: Positive impact of communication on patient health

[Communication with my team] **makes me take a more comprehensive approach to my own health.** [...] And when I'm doing my part, **I see that there's a huge result** and I don't have to see the team as much, and I don't have to take as many medications being proactive and having this proactive team with me and helping me.

CCP Patient

I went on MyChart, I sent a message. I got a reply roughly five days after the fact. I went and got my eyes checked and they told me that they **sent paperwork to [my PCP] for a reference, a referral and they never got a reply.**

Standard Care Patient

- Effective communication positively impacted patient awareness of their health, navigation of the healthcare system, access to health-promoting resources, and care coordination with other specialties
- Conversely, patients who reported ineffective communication experienced negative impacts on their healthcare including delays in care and barriers to social services

Theme 2: Patient satisfaction with team influenced by communication

[My doctor] is probably one of first doctors ever to be kind of communicative, so if I ask questions, if I call her nurse or if I leave a message on MyChart, she responds or has someone respond. And I'm not really used to that, but that is very much consoling to me because it **sounds then like someone actually cares.** Like she actually cares, actually knows me. I'm not just a patient [...]

C4P Patient

- Communication levels influenced overall patient satisfaction with their primary care teams, where patients who experienced effective communication felt supported and cared for
- Patients who reported ineffective communication felt unsupported, dissatisfied, and even dismissed by their care team

Conclusions & Next Steps

- This study highlighted the role of effective communication in patient-centered care, **promoting patient satisfaction and health** and adds to the limited literature on comprehensive care programs
- Qualitative differences between care models suggest that interprofessional care team members (e.g., social workers, nurses) contribute to enhanced provider-patient communication
- Thus, staffing models should dedicate time and personnel to support communication and outreach for patients with complex needs
- Next steps for this project include additional patient interviews to more fully enable direct comparison between the three care models
- Future research directions might also consider quantitative measures of the impact of communication on patient outcomes

Acknowledgements

- CCP Clinical Team including Matt Bachman and Anitra Thomas
- Pritzker School of Medicine Summer Research Program
- NIH National Institute of Aging