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The Green House Project: Accessible, Empowering and Sustainable Communities for the Elderly

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Riverside Health Center

2/3/2020- 3/5/2020

Dr. Heather Stein and Dr. Karen Sokol

Identifying the Need

- Many members of our geriatric community are not able to attend appointments with physicians, physical therapists, and other providers due to several barriers including transportation, physical disability, and financial considerations.
- Home healthcare visits are often utilized to ensure that these patients receive the extensive care that they need. These visits are incredibly valuable, but often become stressful for providers struggling to visit multiple homes across the community in a timely and efficient manner.
- Nursing homes can alleviate this issue somewhat by consolidating patient care to one location, but unfortunately these homes often run the risk of being incredibly isolating to some patients.
- Home healthcare visits and traditional nursing homes have become increasingly less affordable to patients living at and below the poverty line.

Costs and Considerations

- Home visits, initially implemented to serve as a cost saving measure in preventing hospital admissions and ER visits, pose a major cost to the community. In 2014, Medicare spent \$17.7 billion on home health care. Not to mention the downstream effects of overextending provider services (Landers, et al 2016).
- While home health visits have mitigated some physical barriers to healthcare, financial barriers are still very prevalent, and many patients do not qualify for home health care services (Rosati, 2015). Publicly funded programs do not always offset costs for these patients. A 2015 study regarding home health services that support disabled older Americans found that 6 in 10 caregivers providing home care services are paid by personal sources alone, and only 28% receive payment from publicly funded programs.

Community Perspective

- In discussing the costs and benefits of home health visits, a physician at Riverside Health Center shared some unique barriers to healthcare that she has noticed in her practice. She stated that absence of easy public transportation as well as barriers to Medicaid rides are two common barriers she has seen in the community, citing that extensive paperwork can often make accessing healthcare extremely challenging.
- A cardiology nurse at UVM is in favor of greater accessibility for home health care visits, especially for older patients in Burlington who often struggle to make it to their appointments, stating “just seeing a provider when patients are showing early signs of congestive heart failure can prevent an entire hospital stay.”

Intervention and Methodology

- The Green House project is an organization that aims to empower elders and patients with barriers to health care, who thrive in the home health setting, by building communities where patients are treated with equality and mutual respect regardless of economic status. Partnering with contractors and builders in the community, they strive to create long-term and post-acute care by creating viable homes. This model of long-term care could benefit patients who are financially unable to receive privately-funded home health visits or who reside in traditional nursing homes. The Green House home centers care on the patient as well as their family. The organization has established homes in 32 states across the US and continues to grow.
- “The organizational structure of the model is radically different from other models: homes are small in scale, self-contained, and self-sufficient with elders at the center, surrounded by a self-managed team of care partners. Designed to reinforce the identity of elders and eliminate institutional signposts...” – The Green House Project
- By building a community of homes through the Green House Project, we can encourage home health visits without overextending providers and resources by consolidating care to one location where visits can take place efficiently and effectively. This community can be a one-stop care center for patients where they can be visited by the various providers (nurses, physicians, physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, etc.) that they would otherwise see on separate occasions.

Results

- Studies suggest that Green House homes are more cost effective than traditional nursing homes. A 2012 retrospective observational study based on existing data from 9 Green House homes and 4 Traditional nursing homes with a total sample size of 225 residents (97 from Green House homes and 158 Traditional nursing home residents) showed that the overall difference in total Medicare and Medicaid costs per resident over 12 months ranged from \$1300 to \$2300 less for residents in the Green House cohort. The costs consisted of hospitalization and daily care costs.
- Furthermore, evaluations conducted between 2003 and 2012 that investigated outcomes for Green House home residents showed that Green House elders reported improvement in multiple domains of quality of life, specifically privacy, dignity, meaningful activity, relationship, and autonomy.

Effectiveness and Limitations

- Some limitations of this project include financial investment as well as finding a physical space to create a Green House home community.
- Ways in which the effectiveness of this project could be evaluated include conducting surveys for the residents previously residing in Traditional nursing homes who may have transitioned to a Green House home. Residents could comment on the benefits and areas for improvement of the new living environment.
- Another study could look at health outcomes (e.g. hospitalizations, falls, etc.) for residents living in Green House homes compared to Traditional nursing homes or those continuing to receive home health visits while not living in a Green House home community.

Future Directions

- This is a long-term project that entails extensive planning and will likely need several years of development and multiple levels of financial investment. Future projects could involve contacting contractors and builders in the area in order to find a space within the community that could serve as the launch pad for a Burlington Green House Community.
- Another project could involve raising funds and recruiting healthcare providers who would be willing to participate in home health visits for patients at a Green House Community in Burlington.
- The Green House Project organization website contains incredible resources for financial planning, fundraising, recruiting and other helpful tools that can be used for creating a sustainable community.

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