Implementing a Chronic Care Case Management Program at MedZou Community Health Clinic

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Introduction

MedZou Community Health Clinic, the University of Missouri’s student-coordinated free clinic, has served over 900 uninsured patients since opening in October 2008. The clinic functions as the provider of primary care for most patients. Many MedZou patients, some of whom are non-English speakers, have multiple chronic conditions and frequently require assistance for acute exacerbations of these chronic conditions. Unfortunately, the nature of MedZou’s rotating volunteer schedule limits continuity of care for these patients. Additionally, clinic visits for non-English speaking patients are lengthy with the use of interpreter services. These issues highlighted the need for a case management program to improve continuity of care for MedZou patients with chronic medical conditions. This project aimed to (1) identify MedZou patients who would benefit from enrollment in a case management program and (2) implement a program to improve continuity of care for MedZou’s most medically and socially complicated patients in order to achieve the best health outcomes possible.

Methods

- In Summer 2013 candidate patients were prospectively identified for the program based on anecdotal input from highly involved volunteers including the pharmacist, physician advisors, and student directors.
- Logistics were explored, including strategies for management of urgent patient concerns, case manager selection, and patient selection criteria.
- In order to gain a better understanding of the needs of both patients and case managers, Ms. Koehne acted as a pilot case manager for two patients.
- Ms. Koehne communicated with other student-coordinated free clinics with similar programs to exchange ideas on case management systems.
- A manual was created that included instructions for case managers on strategies for handling anticipated problems and social service resources for patients.
- A memorandum of understanding was composed for patients and case managers outlining expectations of both parties.
- Second- and fourth-year medical students applied to be case managers on strategies for handling anticipated problems.
- Teams of case managers and patients were created following case manager selection.
- Physician advisors were recruited to work with the teams.

Results

- In August 2013, eleven second-year case managers and three fourth-year case managers were appointed and paired with seven MedZou patients.
- Case management teams consisted of either one second-year and one fourth-year medical student or one second-year medical student.
- Four physician-advisors worked with specific case management teams.
- Anecdotally, patient feedback indicated patients’ appreciation of the improved patient-provider communication and access to supportive services that this program provided.

Discussion

- The program has been particularly beneficial for non-English speakers for whom communication with the medical team has historically been problematic. Additionally, the continuity of care provided by the program eliminates the need to retell a patient’s complete history at every clinic visit, which is particularly time-consuming when interpreter services are involved.
- Obtaining patient referrals from highly involved volunteers is an efficient and effective way of selecting case management patients.
- The memorandum of understanding is an important tool to uphold accountability for patients and case managers.
- This program represents a promising approach to improving continuity of care for MedZou’s most medically and socially complicated patients using the clinic’s available resources.

Future Directions

- More patients will be enrolled in the program.
- Strategies to encourage participation of MU SOM upperclassmen will be investigated.
- Additional physicians will be recruited to serve as advisors to case management teams.
- Case conference meetings will be held with all case managers and advisors on a monthly basis to discuss patient concerns and future goals.
- Available social services will continue to be explored.

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Figure 1. Patient selection and program structure. Of the approximately 900 patients that have been seen at MedZou since October 2008, seven patients were selected for the case management program. Highly-involved volunteers referred patients based on complexity of chronic conditions and social environment, and ability to communicate in English. The ideal structure of the program is to pair one patient with one second-year medical student, one fourth-year medical student, and one physician advisor.