

research snapshot

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Community-based Discharge Planning Improves Health Services

What is this research about?

Leaving a hospital can be a big step, especially for those patients who need ongoing health services. It's important for there to be a plan in place so that people can transition smoothly from one stage of care to the next. Discharge planning is a process that prepares patients for this transition. Traditionally based in the hospital, it often involves the input of a number of healthcare professionals including doctors, nurses, and social workers.

In 2005, the Bluewater Health hospital in Sarnia and the Sarnia-Lambton branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) received funding to create a community-based discharge planner. The discharge planner, located at the CMHA, would be linked to both the hospital and the full range of mental health services in the community. The planner would meet with each new patient at Bluewater Health and help to develop a discharge plan. The goal?

- To reduce patients' reliance on hospital service
- To provide patients with timely access to care
- To ensure appropriate discharge planning
- To provide seamless access to community-based services in a timely way.

But how effective was this new discharge planner? Does a community-based model work as well as the traditional, hospital-based one?

What you need to know:

Basing discharge services in the community has improved services for people transitioning out of an acute care mental healthcare facility. It has also reduced readmissions rates, curbing the demand for inpatient services at the hospital level.

What did the researchers do?

A team of researchers, led by Elisabeth Jensen at York University, studied the community-based discharge planning model in Sarnia and how it was serving patients. They had a number of questions:

- Do patients feel a part of the discharge planning process?
- Is their transition to community services a satisfying one?
- Are there any gaps in the process?
- Does timely access to community-based services, after discharge, have an impact on the lives of patients? (For instance, does it help improve their health status or access to housing?)

The researchers collected data from people being discharged from an acute care mental health facility. They also looked at other studies of discharge care.

What did the researchers find?

A community-based approach to discharge planning can have significant benefits. Most of the patients, at discharge, had a plan in place. Many of them had wanted some form of counselling in addition to a follow-up with a health care professional or a case manager. One month after discharge, two thirds of those studied were receiving mental health service at least once a month. Six months after discharge, all participants were housed.

The researchers found that the rate of readmissions to the hospital, within one month, fell by 36%. The total number of readmissions dropped by 40%.

How can you use this research?

Policymakers should note that community-based discharge planning will help improve service for people in need of acute care mental health services in other communities. Improved service can have a positive impact on health.

Researchers should note that when developing new healthcare services – or when making changes to existing models – funding for evaluation needs to be built in at the design stage. Adding an economic analysis will give decision-makers important data. Getting the input of patients and their families will help, too. Ultimately, more research is needed on the differences between patients in tertiary and acute care settings.

About the Researchers

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Citation

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Knowledge Mobilization at York

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