

Multiple Chronic Conditions: Complications in Care and Treatment

The Prevalence of Chronic Conditions is Growing in the United States

A chronic condition is a condition that requires ongoing medical care, limits what one can do, and is likely to last longer than one year. Examples include diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disease.

In 2000:

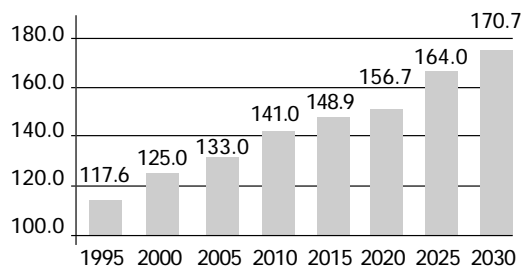
- An estimated 125 million Americans had at least one chronic condition.
- Sixty million had multiple chronic conditions.

By 2020:

- It is estimated that 157 million people will have a chronic condition.
- Eighty-one million people will have multiple chronic conditions.

Figure 1

Projection of Total Number of People with Chronic Conditions (in millions)



Source: RAND Corporation, 2000.

The Cost of Health Care to Treat Chronic Conditions is High

Care for people with chronic conditions consumes 75 percent of the resources of publicly funded health insurance programs and is expected to consume 80 percent by 2020.

When private and public expenditures are combined:

- Seventy-nine percent of overall spending is for people with chronic conditions.
- Fifty-one percent of total expenditures are for those with multiple chronic conditions.

In 1999:

- Sixty-three percent of Medicare beneficiaries had two or more chronic conditions.
- Ninety-five percent of all Medicare spending was for beneficiaries with multiple chronic conditions.

As the data below illustrate, costs increase for people with chronic conditions.

Average Per Capita Health Care Expenditures

Type of Insurance	No Chronic Conditions	One or More Chronic Conditions
65+, Medicare only	\$ 612	\$4,881
65+, Medicare and Private Insurance	\$ 1,390	\$5,517
65+, Medicare and Medicaid	\$ 1,499	\$8,336
Private Insurance	\$ 820	\$2,709
Medicaid	\$ 1,594	\$3,576
No Insurance	\$ 262	\$1,349
Undetermined	\$ 324	\$1,775
Overall	\$ 821	\$3,546

Source: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Medical Expenditure Panel Survey, 1996.

Multiple Chronic Conditions Can Mean Poor Patient Outcomes

Patients and providers know that having multiple chronic conditions complicates care and treatments. Moreover, the various treatments prescribed for different conditions may interact with each other resulting in:

- Declines in health status, and
- A greater likelihood of disability beyond the impact of a single condition.

Multiple chronic conditions require a greater effort by the health community to coordinate treatment in order to ensure better outcomes and an increased quality of life for the patient.

Ambulatory Care Sensitive Conditions (ACSCs) are conditions for which timely and effective outpatient primary care may help to reduce the risk of hospitalization.

Appropriate outpatient care can:

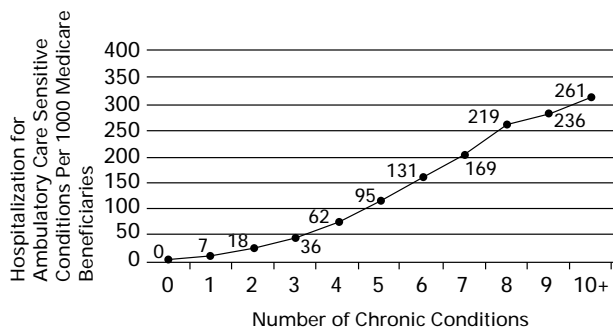
- Prevent the onset of an acute illness,
- Control an acute episodic illness, or
- Manage a chronic condition.

Hospitalizations for such conditions can be a signal that primary care was not adequate. Preventable complications can also occur during hospitalization as a result of complications from surgery or drug administration.

Figure 2 suggests that there is a correlation between the number of chronic conditions a patient has and the frequency of ACSCs and complications. With each additional condition, the hospitalizations associated with avoidable illness increase dramatically.

Figure 2

Poor Care Coordination Leads to Unnecessary Hospitalizations



Source: Medicare Standard Analytic File, 1999.

Conclusion

As the number of people living with multiple chronic conditions continues to grow, consuming more and more of the nation's health care dollars, those who are looking to improve the health care system may need to consider the following changes:

- Re-orienting financing and delivery systems to focus on coordination of care, and
- Re-allocating resources to help improve the health and quality of life for people with multiple chronic conditions.

A growing body of research suggests that coordinated care results in better outcomes at lower cost for people with serious chronic conditions.

About Partnership for Solutions

Partnership for Solutions, led by Johns Hopkins University and The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, is an initiative to improve the care and quality of life for the estimated 125 million Americans with chronic health conditions. The Partnership is engaged in three major activities: conducting original research and identifying existing research that clarifies the nature of the problem; communicating these research findings to policymakers, business leaders, health professionals, advocates, and others; and working with public and private programs to identify promising solutions to the problems faced by people with chronic conditions.

Information in this fact sheet was derived from: J. Wolff, B. Starfield, and G. Anderson, *Prevalence, Expenditures, and Complications of Multiple Chronic Conditions in the Elderly*, unpublished, 2001. A copy of this article can be obtained by contacting Partnership for Solutions at (410) 614-6059.