

Physician Concerns: Caring for People with Chronic Conditions

A chronic health condition is a condition that is likely to last more than a year, limits what one can do, and requires ongoing medical attention. Chronic health conditions are a growing concern for Americans and have a significant and increasing impact on the country's health care financing and delivery system.

Methodology

Partnership for Solutions commissioned a survey from Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., conducted between November 2000 and June 2001, of 1,236 U.S. physicians who provide direct patient care. Physicians assessed the coordination and delivery of services for their patients with chronic conditions and the major barriers to care. They also examined the adequacy of their medical training in preparing them to care for people with chronic conditions.

- Sixty-five percent believe that it is hard for their patients with chronic conditions to obtain prescription drugs.

Figure 1 illustrates areas in which physicians expressed concern about access to care.

Physicians Report that Coordinating Care for Patients is a "Major Problem"

Almost 20 percent of physicians report that it is difficult to coordinate patient care with other physicians involved in the patient's treatment. Furthermore, specialists find care coordination more difficult than do primary care physicians.

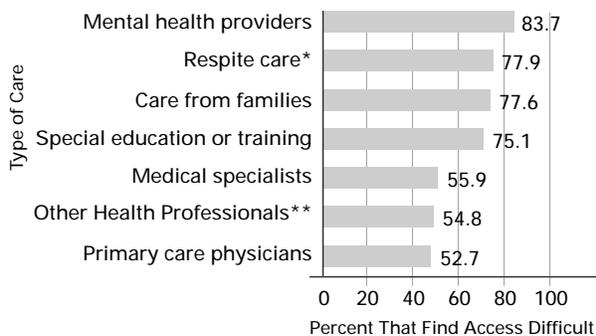
Poor Coordination Results in Poor Health Outcomes

Failure to coordinate care can be harmful to patients (see Figure 2).

- Eighty-five percent of physicians surveyed believe that one or more adverse outcomes result from uncoordinated care.
- More than half of physicians believe that lack of coordination is usually the cause of patients receiving contradictory health information from providers.

Figure 1

Physician Perceptions of Access to Chronic Care Services



* Includes temporary relief for family caregivers.

** Includes physical or occupational therapists, or social workers.

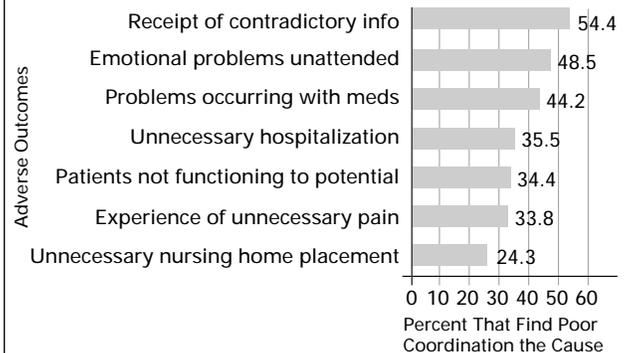
Access to Care is a Problem

Physicians believe that it is difficult for people with chronic conditions to access appropriate care:

- Eighty percent of physicians believe that adequate health insurance for people with chronic conditions is difficult to obtain, and

Figure 2

Physician Perceptions of Adverse Outcomes Related to Poor Coordination of Care



- Additional Partnership for Solutions research reveals that 17 percent of people with chronic conditions receive contradictory medical information.

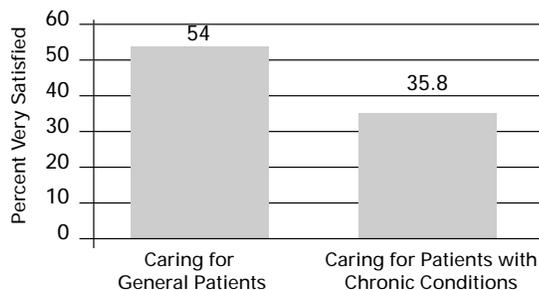
Physicians Believe That Their Training is Inadequate for Chronic Care

Two-thirds of physicians report that their training is not adequate to coordinate care for patients or educate patients with chronic conditions.

Caring for People with Chronic Conditions is Less Satisfying

Figure 3

Comparison of Physician Satisfaction of Care



There are several reasons why physicians are less satisfied caring for patients with chronic conditions:

- Lack of appropriate training makes caring for people with chronic conditions more difficult for doctors, and therefore, less satisfying.
- The difficulties faced in doing the important work of coordinating care may also reduce satisfaction.
- Seeing poor patient outcomes that result from obstacles to good care may not be rewarding to doctors.
- Lack of appropriate mechanisms to reimburse for complex care that includes coordination may decrease satisfaction.

Conclusion

Physicians in the United States perceive problems within the health care financing, delivery, and education systems that affect people who have chronic conditions. They also see adverse consequences as a result of these shortcomings. Given that the proportion of people with chronic conditions is expected to grow as medical treatments advance and the population ages, these shortcomings will likely become more obvious. Those who are looking to improve the health care system may want to consider the issues highlighted by:

- Rethinking aspects of provider training, and
- Improving methods to facilitate care coordination across providers and health care settings.

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.