

Grant Outcome Report

Intensive Wellness Program (IWP): A Health and Mental Health Intervention for High-Cost Patients

The Problem

A relatively small proportion of Medicaid patients account for a disproportionate share of health care utilization and costs. This patient population, frequently very sick and very poor, is often disconnected from a primary care system that could bring them better health outcomes at lower costs. These patients often churn through hospitals and emergency rooms (ERs) and suffer from co-morbid conditions, such as mental illness, substance use, and other chronic conditions for which care is limited. They are often subject to other risk factors—high rates of poverty, illiteracy, housing instability, domestic violence—that affect their treatment patterns and long-term outcomes. For such patients, the solution may not solely lie in medical treatments but in a program that addresses the myriad medical, social, mental health, and substance use issues they face.

In May 2008, the New York State Health Foundation (NYSHealth) awarded a grant to the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Health Center (MLK Health Center), a federally qualified health center affiliated with Bronx-Lebanon Hospital Center, to launch the Intensive Wellness Program (IWP). Based at the MLK Health Center in the Bronx, IWP is an integrated primary care treatment and patient engagement program that includes medical and mental health services, community outreach, communication across multidisciplinary teams, and intensive care management for complex patients with multiple chronic illnesses.

Grant Activities and Outcomes

The project aimed to improve primary care for a set of Medicaid patients with multiple chronic conditions. Key objectives of the project included reduced ER visits and hospitalizations, better delivery of care, improved health outcomes, and reduced costs. Grant funds supported the IWP leadership, staff members for the care management team, the team's training, and the program's analysis and evaluation.

Patients were enrolled in IWP for all of their primary care needs for at least nine-months and received integrated health and mental health care, social services, and substance use counseling at MLK Health Center, along with community outreach and home visits. Ultimately, 143 patients were enrolled in the program.

KEY INFORMATION:

GRANTEE

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Health Center

GRANT TITLE

Intensive Wellness Program (IWP):
A Health and Mental Health Intervention
for High-Cost Patients

DATES

May 2008 – May 2012

GRANT AMOUNT

\$340,631

FUNDING

Cost

Patients were screened to see if they were at high risk for rehospitalization. If a patient consented to be enrolled in the program, the patient underwent a comprehensive intake process that included an extensive discussion not only about medical conditions but living situation, perceived barriers to improving health, and self-view of health.



On average, patients had four chronic illnesses, including a very high prevalence of mental health or substance use conditions. Many patients also had high rates of cognitive impairments, which was a concern for treatment and disease self-management. The complexity of the patient population initially posed challenges for recruitment and enrollment into the program. The program had planned to enroll IWP candidates as they were being discharged from Bronx-Lebanon Hospital Center. IWP staff members gave these patients an appointment at MLK Health Center the next day and followed up with a phone call to confirm their appointment; however, only 20% of patients showed up

for their scheduled appointment. Adding to the complexity was a patient population that often preferred going to the hospital rather than seeking primary care services. As a result, IWP shifted to recruiting candidates from among MLK Health Center patients who had been cross-referenced against the hospital's list of patients at high risk for rehospitalization. During their visits to MLK Health Center, candidates were then referred to IWP to assess their interest in participating in the program.

Patients accepted into IWP were provided intensive team-based care tailored to the severity diagnosis of their diagnosis and social needs, and care teams had weekly meetings to review patient care (including shared access to team discussion notes and updates). The core IWP team consisted of a community health worker (CHW), a master's-level research assistant, a nurse practitioner, a psychiatrist, and the project director. The team met every week for two hours to review patients, particularly those patients who had experienced an ER or hospital encounter in the preceding weeks.

A number of patient participants (49) received home visits. In addition, the CHW was considered the linchpin of IWP's team-based and less-hurried approach to care. The CHW was readily available to patients by phone, met patients whenever they came into the clinic, expedited registration, alerted the doctor or nurse to patients' arrival, and met with patients after medical visits to review plans and learn of their satisfaction with the visit. The CHW connected patients to culturally sensitive and compatible clinic staff members who could give them the special contact and extra time they needed.

Among the outcomes of the project:

- Inpatient admissions and ER visits among IWP participants were significantly reduced;
- IWP saved about \$10,000 per patient per year. Even after accounting for the cost of the intervention (including all the staff members involved, which was estimated as \$200,000 per year per 100 patients), MLK Health Center concluded that the IWP intervention saved \$500,000 to \$800,000 per 100 patients per year.
- Program costs were \$170 per member per month. Estimated savings of \$7,000 to \$10,000 would support a per-member per-month expenditure of \$580 to \$830.

Future

IWP was premised on the notion that high-need patients with complex conditions could not successfully be served by the typical care management system; rather, they would respond better to a specially tailored approach. The program also recognized the need for a specialized care team that was able both to steer patients to the appropriate care and continuously review and make necessary modifications to that care.

IWP, under the leadership of Bronx-Lebanon Hospital Center, continues to offer both mental health and general health care for patients at MLK Health Center. Bronx-Lebanon Hospital Center and MLK Health Center are bringing the concept of IWP to scale in part through Bronx-Lebanon Health Center's designation as a New York State Medicaid health home. As a health home, it brings integrated care management services to patients with a more moderate range of conditions and risk factors, including those with fewer complexities than the IWP patient population. The health home will also have greater ability to see what is happening to its patients, including being able to access data from New York State and other providers serving those same patients.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

ABOUT THE GRANTEE

More than forty years ago, a group of visionary physicians created a health center focused on the social rehabilitation of a whole neighborhood as a way to break the cycle of poverty. Since its beginning, the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Health Center has strived to fulfill its mission of responding to the health care needs of community residents, regardless of background or ability to pay. It is part of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Health Center Service Network, which consists of nine primary care and dental centers. Primary and specialty care services are provided at its practice locations, including medical, dental, pediatrics, OB/GYN, ophthalmology, optometry, and allergy treatment. Health education and nutrition counseling are also offered.

GRANTEE CONTACT

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