PROJECT INFORMATION

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Comparing Two Ways to Help Patients Get Follow-Up Care after a Mental Health Visit to the Emergency Room -- The EPIC Study

Principal investigator

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Organization

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What was the research about?

Many people go to emergency rooms, or ERs, for urgent mental health problems. Getting follow-up mental health care after leaving the ER can improve people's health. But less than half of people get follow-up care.

Care management helps patients get follow-up care and resources that can improve their health and quality of life. But not enough mental health professionals are available to offer care management to everyone who needs it. In this study, the research team compared care management delivered by

- Professionals, such as nurses, social workers, or counselors
- Peers recovering from a mental health problem

The research team looked at how often people who visited an ER for a mental health problem in the two groups got follow-up mental health care at a clinic.

What were the results?

People with professional care managers were more likely to have a follow-up mental health visit within one month after they left the ER than people with peer care managers.

People with professional and peer care managers didn't differ in the number of follow-up visits they attended or in new admissions to the ER or hospital within six months.

Who was in the study?

The study included 326 adults who received mental health care in one of eight ERs in South Carolina. Of these patients, 53 percent were White, 40 percent were Black, and 7 percent were another race; 19 percent were Hispanic. The average patient age was 35, and 54 percent were men.

What did the research team do?

The research team assigned patients by chance to work with either a professional or a peer care manager. The team trained all care managers. Care managers met with each patient during or shortly after their ER visit. Care managers talked with patients about barriers to getting care. They helped patients set goals to overcome those barriers. Patients and care managers also talked about their roles in the recovery process. Care managers met with patients monthly for five months and then called every month for six months.

To see how often patients received care after leaving the ER, the research team looked at patient health records up to six months.

Patients, healthcare providers, health insurers, and patient advocates helped plan and conduct the study.

What were the limits of the study?

Fewer people enrolled in the study than planned. Findings may have differed if more people had enrolled in the study. ERs differed in what peer

managers could do and how they were supervised, which may have affected the results. Because the study didn't compare professional and peer care management with usual care, the research team can't say for sure if care management or something else led to follow-up visits.

Future research could look at reasons, like differences in training, for differences in how care managers provided care.

How can people use the results?

Healthcare providers can use the results when considering ways to help people with mental health problems get follow-up care after leaving the ER.

To learn more about this project, visit www.pcori.org/Druss351.