PROJECT INFORMATION

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Using a Transitional Care Program to Prepare Patients to Take Care of Themselves after Leaving the Hospital

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Organization

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What was the research about?

When patients go home after a hospital stay, they may still need help. Patients who can't take care of themselves at home are more likely to go back to the hospital within the first month of going home.

In this study, the research team tested a program to coach and support patients to take care of themselves after going home from the hospital. The program had several parts:

- A pharmacist taught patients about the medicine they would be taking at home.
- A nurse helped patients get ready for being at home.
- A visiting nurse or pharmacist visited patients at home.
- A nurse from patients' regular doctors' offices checked in with patients, coached patients by phone or video calls, and saw patients during any follow-up doctor visits.

The team compared this program with the usual care that patients got when leaving the hospital.

What were the results?

The study found no difference between patients who were in the program and those who got usual care in how often patients had to go back to the hospital within a month of going home. Patients who were in

the program had fewer new or worse symptoms and fewer adverse events within a month of going home compared with patients who got usual care. An adverse event is an injury or other problem that results from the care patients receive rather than their health problems.

There was no difference between patients who were in the program and those who got usual care in how patients felt about the care they received.

Who was in the study?

The study included 1,657 adult patients at two hospitals in Massachusetts. Each patient was seeing a doctor at 1 of 18 offices. Of these patients, 54 percent were women, 74 percent were white, and 26 percent were other races.

What did the research team do?

The research team assigned the 18 doctors' offices by chance to start the program at different times during the study. Next, the team looked at hospital records to compare patients within the same doctors' offices before and after the offices started to use the program. Patients also took a telephone survey one month after going home from the hospital.

An advisory group gave the team input during the study. The group included patients who had recently been in the hospital and caregivers of patients who had been in the hospital.

What were the limits of the study?

The hospitals and doctors' offices didn't all carry out the program as planned. For example, not all the hospitals and doctors' offices used all parts of the program or started the program on time. It is hard to tell how the program might have worked if the hospitals and doctors' offices had carried the program out as planned.

Future research can look at the best way to help hospitals and doctors' offices help patients when they leave the hospital.

How can people use the results?

Researchers can use these results to identify other ways of supporting patients when going home from the hospital. This support may help patients avoid having their health problems get worse.

To learn more about this project, visit pcori.org/Schnipper083.