

Helping Patients Living in Rural Areas Transition from Hospital to Home -- The ROADMAP Study

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What was the research about?

When patients go home after a hospital stay, they may still need help. Having support is important to help patients recover and prevent them from having to go back to the hospital. Patients may not know how to plan follow-up care or get help from community organizations. Patients who live in rural areas may have a hard time getting support close to where they live.

In this study, the research team compared a group of patients receiving standard support with a group in a new program. The new program was designed to support people living in rural areas when they go home from the hospital. The team looked to see if patients in the new program went back to the hospital less than those who weren't in the program.

What were the results?

In the first 30 days after going home, patients in the new program had fewer hospital stays than those who weren't in the program.

The two groups didn't differ in

- The number of emergency room, or ER, visits
- The number of patients with at least one hospital stay or ER visit
- Physical or mental health

- The number of times patients went to their doctor after going home
- How patients rated the quality of the support they received from the hospital

Who was in the study?

The study included 127 patients living in four rural counties in Montana. Of these, 87 percent were white, and 10 percent were American Indian or Alaska Native. The average age was 61, and 57 percent were men.

What did the research team do?

The research team created the new program to help patients who live in rural areas when they go home from the hospital. Hospital staff helped patients in the program figure out what they would need at home while they were recovering, such as help with cleaning or buying groceries. Then staff helped patients find resources near home to meet these needs. Staff also helped patients schedule follow-up doctor visits and manage their care across different doctors.

For patients receiving usual support, staff helped arrange transportation home and gave basic guidance for self-care and taking medicine once they were home.

During the first three months after leaving the hospital, the research team gave patients eight surveys about the support they received. The team also looked at patients' health records.

Patients, doctors, and hospital staff helped design the study.

What were the limits of the study?

The study only included patients ages 18 to 75. Results may differ for patients older than 75. The study took place in one state and most patients in the study were white. Results may differ for people in other states or from other racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Future research could look at other ways to help patients in rural areas when they go home from the hospital.

How can people use the results?

Hospitals can use these results when thinking about ways to support patients in rural areas when they leave the hospital.

To learn more about this project, visit www.pcori.org/Seekins221.