

Managing Chronic Conditions in Elderly Patients: The Role of Home Care Nurses

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Abstract

Chronic conditions, such as hypertension, diabetes, heart failure, chronic kidney disease, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, are common in the elderly population and are the leading causes of patient hospitalization, readmission, and high use of healthcare services. One important way to help the elderly manage their chronic conditions and to prevent hospitalizations and emergency department visits is to provide effective home-based care. Home healthcare, especially by home care nurses, plays a key role in providing comprehensive care in specific high-risk elderly populations, which often leads to significant cost savings. A case study of congestive heart failure is used to illustrate key opportunities and challenges of using home care nurses to provide effective home-based care for common chronic conditions in elderly patients.

Keywords: COPD, home care, patients, support, telehealth

1. Introduction

The increasing prevalence of chronic diseases in the elderly has dramatic economic and caregiving implications. Preventing, slowing the progression of, or minimizing the symptoms of these chronic conditions reduces disability, often decreases health care costs, and improves the likelihood of successful aging. Typically, programs and interventions focus on those chronic conditions that are most prevalent in the elderly, including diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, heart failure, chronic ulcers, depression, osteoporosis, and difficult-to-control drug therapies. Home care nurses may play a critical role in assisting this population, especially if they adopt management models that integrate gerontological or geriatric methodologies. (Wang et al.2021)

One such approach is Living Well with Chronic Conditions, which has produced demonstrable improvements in health and social outcomes and reductions in health care costs for caregivers, while being cost-effective for both the delivery system and public payer. This approach has seven content areas: problem solving and goal setting; dealing with difficult emotions; nutrition and exercise; making decisions and working with health care professionals; using prescribed medications wisely; understanding and using services; and managing symptoms. This illustrates some home care nursing role behaviors to achieve these content areas through case studies of the successful use of geriatric primary care and geriatric case management methodologies, which improved the health and quality of life of three elderly clients who had multiple chronic conditions. This concludes by providing a discussion of the implications for all care settings as well as making policy-level recommendations. (Kendzerska et al.2021)

1.1. Overview of Chronic Conditions in Elderly Patients

The prevalence of elderly patients with chronic conditions, including chronic noncommunicable diseases, is increasing. With increased longevity and complex needs, a transformational effort is needed to redefine the approach to elderly patients with chronic conditions. This chapter will provide an overview of a number of chronic conditions, including diseases of the heart, blood vessels, gut and liver, kidneys, brain and nervous system, endocrine glands, connective tissues, cancer, and the respiratory system, as well as multiple chronic conditions in the elderly. We will also describe their common symptoms, treatments, and associated psychological burdens, and report evidence to support the unmet needs of home care for elderly patients with chronic conditions. In particular, difficulties in self-management and the need to improve a continuum of care in the broader society will be highlighted, with the importance of designing and implementing strategically

prioritized evidence-based innovation and proactive interventions for both patients and caregivers, supported to prevent catastrophic and reactive institutional care interventions. (Maier et al., 2021)

In a rapidly aging population, assembling the insights to innovate and effectively intervene to improve frail elderly patients' longitudinal clinical outcomes is critical. Well-structured home care teams can collaborate and coordinate the overall implementation with systemic integrated mechanisms and process structures to enable shared decision-making care plans for communized elderly patients. Ultimately, we aim to have the home care teams foster meaningful health and long life for elderly patients, contributing towards the broader goal of enhancing a fresh and greater societal value as a whole. No more segregated and fragmented post-acute care, but an effective continuum of care to build solid, rock-based integrated care communities providing proactive upstream health interventions to slow down the spiraling trajectory of irreversible disability. This in vivo longitudinal understanding will allow elderly patients to continue to age in a familiar home environment where supportive caregivers can also add life to years. (Hedqvist et al., 2023)

2. The Importance of Home Care Nursing for Elderly Patients

Internationally, the demand for home care has been increasing due to the growing elderly population and health care costs. Home care has enabled patient continuity of care, provided individualized care, and improved patient autonomy. In particular, home care is critical for frail elderly persons who have multiple illnesses and suffer from reduced physical and mental functions. Life expectancy is affected not only by increased aging but also by a reduction in risk factors such as smoking, lowered serum cholesterol, and reduced severe cardiovascular diseases. Elderly persons who are receiving care at home are at high risk of developing complications including stroke, aspiration pneumonia, falls, urinary tract infections, and delirium. Persons with chronic diseases have many serious complicating factors and are affected by prevailing factors that determine the life expectancy of the elderly. (Feng et al.2020)

The purpose of elderly care is to improve their physical and mental functions so that the elderly can have good health and longevity. Of these treatments, perhaps the most frequently chosen are functional training and home care. In particular, functional training with a physical, occupational, or rehabilitation therapist is highly recommended. Many elderly individuals have physical disorders; hence, appropriate rehabilitation therapists provide physical therapy to relieve disabilities and improve their condition. Often, these elderly individuals especially need home care nursing because they live their lives in home settings. Elderly visits to hospitals are inconvenient due to their chronic diseases and lack of motivation. Furthermore, with the increase in elderly people with sleep disorders, there is a real need for nighttime care services in care management. Therefore, for those elderly individuals who have difficulty moving to hospitals, home care nursing is essential. (Costa et al.2020)

3. Challenges in Managing Chronic Conditions at Home

There are many challenges in caring for and managing chronic conditions at home for sick clients, especially the increasing number of elderly patients. For the first issue, the community health nurses worked in three shifts at the community health center, from morning to midnight, and they rendered emergency services from midnight to dawn. One time, a community health nurse needed to educate her clients on the use of an oxygen concentrator before the client was discharged by a doctor. The family of a terminally ill client, who was in need of emergency assistance, had to call an ambulance. The client was dead on arrival upon reaching the nearest public hospital. With the help of the relatives and the health worker, the body of the client was already at the front of the gate of the public hospital when the community health nurse arrived. They did not lose hope, though, as every day is a challenge.

(Philip et al.2021)The nurse's visits are every Monday morning, Wednesday morning, and Friday afternoon. But clients' requests, emergencies, and other activities of the community health nurse, such as meetings and the benchmarking program, are unpredictable. On all other days, the clients and their family members can seek advice, treatment, or consultation in the health station. This lowering of the frequency of home visits disrupts the continuity of care of the clients and the family and the therapeutic relationships between the clients and their family with the nurse.

3.1. Medication Management

Elderly patients frequently need to manage multiple medications, which can be complex. Home care nurses play an important role in medication management by ensuring that patients take their medications as they have been prescribed. To successfully manage medications, patients need to be able to understand their medication schedules, take the correct doses, and report any medication-related side effects or dose changes. Medication schedules that are difficult to maintain are one of the most common reasons for nonadherence. Assessments of medication management abilities should include an evaluation of sensory deficits, such as diminished sight, hearing, and taste. Maintaining a patient chart with medication names, dosages, administration times, and reasons for prescriptions can also be helpful. (Heras et al.2021)

Incorrect administration, added to forgetfulness, problems with medication understanding, and patient instability, are common reasons why rehabilitation patients fail to take their medication as prescribed. Patients on many polypharmacy regimens may require multiple reminders. If reminders for medication adherence are a

problem, coordination with home caregivers may be needed. A common strategy home caregivers use in helping elderly patients maintain medication schedules is the use of containers with compartments for each day of the week. This strategy helps both caregivers and patients understand which medications to take, but it must be accompanied by frequent reminders by the caregiver or other reminders that can be affixed to the containers. Helping patients to organize their pills will help home caregivers ensure that they are administering the correct dose and that the supply is appropriate for the medication schedule. (Shaik et al., 2023)

3.2. Diet and Nutrition

Diet is a key individual factor in good health. Studies of elderly people around the world show that the key nutritional problems for the elderly are energy imbalances—often a combination of inadequate energy intake relative to energy output and other health issues, such as dehydration and unintentional weight loss. Although energy requirements decline with age because the BMR falls with reductions in fat mass and in fat-free mass, the inability to absorb elements in food declines, and many people may not consume the calories needed each day. Older adults may exhibit inappropriate food habits, such as inadequate intake and refusal of food groups, often triggered by emotional problems, loneliness, and loss of self-esteem. However, the relative frequency of malnutrition from excess food intake is rising and causing more serious health consequences. Adequate hydration is another common dietary problem among the elderly population. (Johnson, 2021)

Older adults frequently consume inadequate fluids, which can lead to dehydration and negative health outcomes. Some seniors may lose their sense of thirst, and others may experience difficulty swallowing. Most have limited mobility and are unlikely to seek water when thirsty. Most rely on nurses, family members, or other caregivers to provide water. Lack of proper nutrition leads to an increased rate of illness and injury. After hospitalization for an acute illness, the rates of readmission are high due to inadequate nutritional status of patients. Furthermore, it is known that patients who have restricted fluid intake are at risk of dehydration in the home and under institutional care conditions as well. The problem raises issues of ethics, legality, and rights, and measures and characteristics of quality of care. The possibility of avoiding thirst and dehydration in care should be a basic goal. (Edmonds et al.2021)

4. Best Practices in Home Care Nursing for Chronic Conditions

Home care nursing is essential for elderly patients who experience chronic health conditions that contribute to functional impairment, declining independence, and increased usage of health care resources. Home allows elderly individuals to experience personal freedom and maintain their connection with the community. Home health services typically offer a range of nursing services that include skilled nursing care, providing treatments, and instructing patients and caregivers about the proper use of medications and medical equipment. While home health nurses have expertise in general procedures, such as wound care, diabetic care, pain management, coordination of necessary equipment and supplies, or medication management, each home visit presents diverse problems and needs of the client for the nurse to assess and manage. (World Health Organization, 2020)

A successful nurse-patient relationship is based on trust and can only grow when it is practiced over time. It may involve ongoing dialogue between the nurse and the chronically ill patient about multiple physical, emotional, interrelational, and spiritual issues. The use of listening skills so that the patient can tell the story of their condition, having empathy, and educating and coaching related to the lifestyle effects on the chronic condition are integral to managing chronic health problems in elderly patients. Goals are to respond to the patient's needs while promoting quality of life by meeting challenges, optimizing the patient's strengths, and decreasing the level of impairment imposed by the conditions. The end result of successful home care is a patient who has more confidence in self-managing their health problems, controlling as much of the decision-making as possible, and evaluating their life as being as normal as possible. (Nicholson et al.2020)

5. Case Studies and Success Stories in ksa

Saudi Arabia is facing a high rate of chronic illnesses among the elderly population. This is due to the global phenomenon of aging populations, considering the demographic challenges around the world. Chronic conditions management in the elderly is one of the main reasons for the increasing health care costs for the government in Saudi Arabia. There are some attempts documenting and presenting chronic conditions management for elderly patients in Saudi Arabia; all available in medical conferences and experiences shared by some health care professionals. There is no authentic document that describes the role of home care nurses in the care of chronic conditions and diseases in elderly patients in Saudi Arabia.

A large body of research has been generated which has confirmed the growing belief among leading policymakers and health professionals that chronic conditions and diseases do not just go away but may be controlled through medical and non-medical interventions. The paper is based on the experiences and body of knowledge developed through the medical and nursing literature as well as the experiences of home care nurses caring for elderly patients in Saudi Arabia with chronic conditions. The paper presents and discusses: first, the concept and significance of home care; then the concept and effects of chronic conditions; followed by two case studies, which show elderly patients in Saudi Arabia managing their chronic conditions within their homes, where they need home care nurses. Finally, success stories are highlighted and discussed under a chapter

focused on findings. Examples of policy and legislation from international and Saudi Arabian situations are discussed. Also, the presenting paper ends with some suggestions for future research and some final thoughts.

conclusions

The implementation of innovative models for patient care may lead to an improvement in clinical and health outcomes in the delivery of care to patients with chronic diseases, reducing the use of healthcare resources and healthcare costs, as in the case of patient-centered management of chronic diseases. A demonstrated effectiveness of care in patients with chronic diseases organized through the implementation of advanced home care services shows an alignment of healthcare organizations to the patient-centered model, reducing overestimation of healthcare costs due to the age and number of chronic diseases reported. Nurses have to perform the role of monitoring and guidance as it forms the basis of management of chronic conditions, focusing on geriatric syndromes as well as monitoring the way chronic conditions tend to cluster among elderly patients rather than focusing entirely on those associated with specific diseases. The implementation of patient-centered management for elderly patients, organized through innovative home care services based on health professionals skilled in providing care to elderly patients, can achieve improved patient outcomes by reducing the cost of care, thus benefiting patients and the healthcare system.

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