

Exploring a hospital's role in addressing homelessness: a qualitative evaluation of a hospital-housing partnership for seniors and disabled patients

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Abstract:

Statement of Problem: Homelessness is prevalent in hospitalized patients and associated with adverse outcomes, but hospitalization is frequently a missed opportunity for meaningful connection to housing and support that could mitigate these outcomes.

Learning Objectives:

1. Demonstrate how hospitals can innovate to meaningfully address complex needs of patients experiencing homelessness through partnerships and systems integration.
2. Share findings from a qualitative evaluation of transitional housing residents to understand acceptability and impact on health and well-being.

Description of Problem/Intervention:

In December 2023, a safety-net hospital located in the mountain west partnered with a local housing authority to launch a transitional housing program for at-risk hospitalized patients experiencing homelessness. Located on the main hospital campus, the housing program provides 14 housing units for elderly or disabled patients, who are identified during hospitalization and discharged directly into the program where they receive support from a social worker and a housing navigator through a shared staffing model. The program aims to stabilize health conditions, reduce avoidable acute care utilization by increasing engagement in primary and preventative healthcare, foster community connections to address health related-social needs, and facilitate entry into permanent housing.

Measures of success: We conducted semi-structured interviews with 16 participants who had been enrolled in the program for at least 45 days. Interviews explored participants' perceptions of the program's acceptability, benefits, barriers, and impact on health and resource access. Thematic analysis was conducted with themes identified a priori and inductively through content analysis.

Findings to Date: Three main themes emerged from data analysis: 1) Perceived Benefits: Participants valued having a dedicated case manager to assist with obtaining vital identity documentation and applying for public assistance, and appreciated the proximity of housing to healthcare services; 2) Health Improvements and Enhanced Access to Care: Participants reported improved medication adherence and more consistent attendance at medical appointments; 3) Impact on Well-being: Participants expressed deep gratitude for the housing

opportunity, describing it as a pivotal step toward securing permanent housing. For some, it was their first time off the streets in over a decade. They shared stories of past homelessness with program staff to assess implementation challenges and identify opportunities for improvement and contrasted those experiences with their new environment. Additional program evaluation will examine staff perspectives and assess the program's longer-term impact on housing and health outcomes.

Key Lessons for Dissemination: Our evaluation suggests that this transitional housing program is highly regarded by participants, providing meaningful improvements to physical and mental well-being, and improved access to critical supports. Our findings underscore the importance of housing-health partnerships in addressing the complex needs of individuals experiencing homelessness, including those utilizing hospital systems.