

Is the WellQor Way a new approach to implementing the IMPACT model?

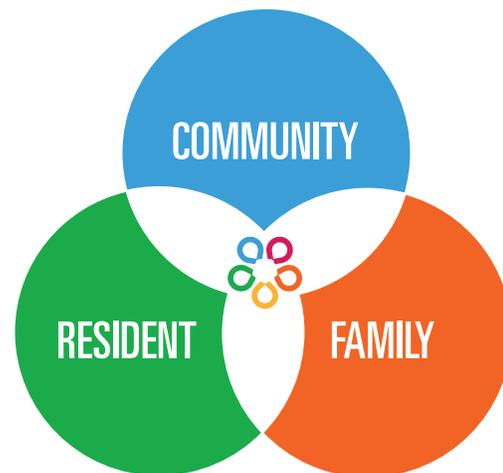
The complicated association between mental health and chronic illness among the elderly is well documented, and is the reason a treatment team must ensure that the physical as well as the emotional wellbeing of the aged patient is safeguarded. Maintaining optimal mental health of elderly patients is key to ensuring improved health outcomes, but delivering comprehensive healthcare to this population can be complex and costly, if the appropriate measures are not in place.

The WellQor Way utilizes a collaborative approach to managing the patients who are entrusted to our care. Our team of qualified providers are integrated into the treatment teams at senior living facilities, thereby guaranteeing dedicated and reliable access to comprehensive care. Our onsite presence ensures that more time is spent with the patients, in familiar surroundings, addressing their concerns in a proactive manner. The underlying emotional strains associated with aging, adjusting to a new non-independent lifestyle, dealing with the loss of spouses, separation from family, chronic illnesses, and end of life concerns, are likely to be more readily identified and managed more quickly and effectively. Interventions to address these concerns can be more promptly implemented, thereby preventing progression of conditions requiring increased medication use, expensive emergency room visits, hospitalizations, inpatient care and other clinical interventions to address both emotional and physical decompensation.

Similar concepts were examined in the Improving Mood-Promoting Access to Collaborative Treatment (IMPACT) study, the first large randomized controlled trial of treatment for depression among older adults. Approximately two thousand (1,801) depressed older adults from across the United States were followed for two years to determine whether utilizing a

collaborative treatment approach to manage their depression and other chronic conditions would have any effect on health outcomes, and to see if and how this approach might affect overall healthcare costs versus usual care.

The interventions utilized in the IMPACT study were implemented for one year, yet even 4 years after the study, a post hoc analysis showed that the total cost associated with managing the health of patients in the IMPACT group was significantly lower than for patients receiving usual care. In fact, considering the amount saved per patient across all categories of health care costs, including inpatient and outpatient care as well as pharmaceutical treatments, it was determined that there was a 6:1 return on investment for every dollar spent in implementing collaborative care.



The primary results of the IMPACT study showed that patients assigned to the collaborative care group, where mental health providers were integrally involved in the management of their emotional health, experienced a significant improvement in their quality of life. Cohort studies further affirmed that the patients who received the prescribed collaborative care, reported reduced pain intensity and improved physical functioning, resulting in the decreased need for pain reducing medications for painful conditions. With access to mental health professionals as a part of their care team, patients reported improved functional ability and fewer complications related to comorbid chronic illnesses, as well as less depressive symptoms leading to a reduction in the need for psychotropic medication. It is important to note

here, that antidepressants are identified among potential fall risks in older adults. In fact, the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control published an article in 2017, highlighting that falls among the elderly are serious and costly. The article went on to point out that one out of every five falls, in this population, usually leads to a serious bone or head injury and that falling has been identified as the most common cause of traumatic brain injuries in this group.

The IMPACT study results further established that a collaborative approach to elder care, more than doubled the effectiveness of standard depression care in a primary care setting, and that implementing this method of comprehensive care, is one way to mitigate risks, improve outcomes and avoid unnecessary healthcare spending. Moreover, the observed outcomes were lasting, and persisted well beyond the duration of the study, and the model is now recognized worldwide as an effective treatment approach to managing health among elderly patients. In its 2011 annual report, the John A. Hartford Foundation (which funded the IMPACT study), documented several such cases of patients being effectively treated using the model to address depression and other mental health concerns. One particularly interesting case involved a patient who was recently treated for a fall injury and was initially thought to be showing signs of dementia, however upon further investigation, it was discovered that he was experiencing delirium, a secondary effect of an unresolved hospital acquired infection.

Under usual circumstances, primary care physicians have limited time to assess and treat the presenting concerns of all their patients. This means that there is an increased risk of misdiagnosis, especially among those who present with multiple chronic conditions and have further complications due to emotional distress.

Implementing a collaborative care approach requires the formation of an interdisciplinary clinical team. This team should generally consist of a primary care physician who manages the physical complaints of the patient, in addition to a behavioral health care specialist who is trained and equipped to identify and address any underlying emotional concerns that a patient may have. With the close involvement of the patient's family and/or caregivers, this approach is proven to be an effective model, and has not only led to the improvement

in patients' quality of life, but it also produces a significant reduction in the overall cost of treatment. Identifying potential stressors in a timely manner and reducing risk factors are critical for maintaining good physical and emotional health for patients, and is a key function of a comprehensive care team.

According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), healthcare teams should ensure a "triple aim" approach to healthcare management. This approach will: 1) improve access to care, 2) improve quality and outcomes of care, and 3) reduce total healthcare costs. Incorporating the onsite services of WellQor's behavioral health providers, is not only a sure step towards adopting a collaborative care model, but also aligns well with the CMS "triple aim" guidelines.

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Reference:

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