

Strategies to Reduce Preventable Hospital Utilization by Addressing Behavioral Health Needs

Issue 7 Coordinate Caregiver Support

This nine-part series developed by TMF Health Quality Institute explores the integration of evidence-based strategies that identify and address underlying behavioral health needs as an approach to reducing preventable hospital utilization.

What Is the Evidence:



30% Reduction in Hospital Readmissions

California's In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) and the Center for Caregiver Advancement (CCA) developed an initiative that offered caregivers a 16-week training course focused on how to manage health care needs within the home and when it was appropriate to go to the emergency room (ER). The cohort that took the training saw a 30% reduction in hospital readmissions and a 25% reduction in ER visits over a 12-month period, with estimated savings of \$1,500 per patient per year (Chapman et al., 2024).



30% Reduction in 30-Day Readmissions

The American Association of Retired Persons Public Policy Institute, in collaboration with the United Hospital Fund, concluded that structured education and support for caregivers of older adults with chronic illnesses resulted in a 30% reduction in 30-day hospital readmissions by improving medication management and symptom monitoring at home (Reinhard et al., 2016).

What Is It:

Caregiver support actively includes patients' family members or informal caregivers in all aspects of the health care process, from hospitalization through discharge and the transition back to the community. Caregivers play a vital role in assisting patients with self-management, medication adherence



and coordination of follow-up care, all of which can directly influence health outcomes (Haley et al., 2020). Engaging caregivers early in the treatment process allows health care teams to perform structured assessments of both patients' needs and caregiver capacity, identifying potential gaps where additional services or support may be necessary (Schultz et al., 2021).

It is also essential to provide caregivers with resources to support their own well-being, such as respite care, caregiver support groups, counseling services and educational programs focused on stress management and coping strategies.

Supporting the caregiver's physical, emotional and mental health is crucial, as caregiver stress and burnout can negatively impact their ability to provide effective care (Liu et al., 2020). Furthermore, including caregivers in discharge planning, medication education and outpatient care coordination ensures they are informed and confident in managing the patient's care at home. Educating caregivers on self-management strategies and connecting them to community resources further strengthens their ability to reduce unnecessary emergency department visits and hospital readmissions.



What I Can Do:

- Implement structured caregiver training programs
- Ensure caregiver participation in comprehensive post-discharge education
- Develop a caregiver support hotline
- Offer periodic mental health check-ins and respite care resources

Where It's Happening:

Texas Health Resources, the Faith Community Nursing Program and Health Promoters, collaborates with local churches to provide mental, physical and spiritual care. In 2023, registered nurses in the program offered free preventive screenings for diabetes, hypertension and other health concerns while also serving as advocates, counselors and patient navigators—roles that often ease the burden on caregivers. The program also seeks to reduce the stigma around mental health by fostering open discussions within congregations. Volunteers contributed 13,758 unpaid hours in 2023, assisting caregivers and families with transportation, medication access and chronic disease education, ultimately helping prevent hospital readmissions.



Resources:

- [Quick Guide: Resources for Preventing Avoidable Readmissions](#)

Baylor Scott & White, a major Texas hospital system, connects volunteers with underserved communities through its Faith Community Program, offering patient navigation, education and support to promote health and wellness. Donna Stauber, PhD, System Program Manager, highlights the vital role of caregiver volunteers in providing a “ministry of presence,” offering social support, resource connections and encouragement for medical adherence. Volunteers help patients build trust in health care, provide companionship, assist with transportation to medical visits and educate them on symptom management to prevent complications. Since its launch in 2014, the program has saved \$103,000 in health care costs, expanded to ten cities and trained over 450 caregivers, significantly reducing hospital readmissions. Baylor Scott & White has reported a 40% decrease in inpatient readmissions and a 30% drop in emergency department visits among program participants. As of 2025, 347 of 600 referred patients have been matched with a volunteer caregiver.