Research Center leads Groundbreaking Studies on Dementia Care

Two new studies led by research scientist Julia Burgdorf, PHD and other researchers at the VNS Health Center for Home Care Policy and Research illustrate how home health care plays a crucial role for dementia care. One reveals a critical gap in dementia care: only 31% of Medicare-certified home health patients report their dementia diagnosis to their home health provider. The other study utilizes 2018 Medicare data to reveal how a small percentage of home health patients received social worker support.

The team's study on dementia diagnosis was published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*. Over 1.3 million Medicare home health recipients were analyzed. The findings suggest that when dementia goes unreported, patients are more likely to experience worse health outcomes compared to reported cases.

> *"Results suggest that [home health] providers often lack pertinent information regarding patients' dementia status, and patients with undocumented dementia more often experience acute care utilization."*
>
> *— VNS Health Research Team*

The Cost of Silence

Patients who did not disclose their dementia diagnosis had, on average, three additional days of home health care compared to those with documented diagnoses. They were also more likely to receive physical therapy and less likely to receive social work services. In contrast, patients who had documented dementia were more likely to experience longer hospital stays, higher

emergency department use, and lower odds of being discharged to self-care – indicators of more complex care needs being recognized and addressed.

A Growing Need for Specialized Dementia Care

Nearly 30% of the home health patients examined in the U.S. are living with dementia – a number that continues to grow as the population ages. Among home health patients, only 11% receive social worker support and most patients only receive one home visit. Access to support is even lower for patients receiving care from for-profit or rural home health agencies. Caregiving for individuals with dementia is becoming an increasing challenge for caregivers across the nation. In response, many home-based care providers are expanding their expertise in dementia care.

Innovating Dementia Care in the Home

These studies highlights the urgent need for better communication and documentation practices in home health care. Organizations are differentiating themselves by training staff to manage complex dementia cases. VNS Health is committed to improving outcomes for individuals with dementia through research, education, and specialized care programs like our Dementia Care at Home program.

In partnership with Inspired Memory Care, our Dementia Care at Home program offers specialized care plans for people with dementia. The program is designed to support caregivers while keeping their loved ones engaged and cared for. A dedicated care team comprised of a memory care specialist, a registered nurse, and a specially trained home health aide act as the support system for caregivers.

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