

Spain: Case management for the chronically ill in Andalusia

In order to improve care for people with chronic illnesses, the disabled and the elderly, the government of the Spanish region of Andalusia set up a case management program in 2002. After the five-year implementation phase the program can lay claim to significant successes.

Aims – What was to be achieved?

The case management program in Andalusia is aimed at vulnerable groups such as the chronically ill and patients with special needs. In particular, the program is designed to:

- improve the quality of life of the patients
- reduce the excessive burden placed on relatives entrusted with their care
- provide better access to social services and rehabilitation facilities
- lower the number of emergency admissions



In practice: How do Andalusian case managers go about their work?

When a patient with a complex condition is discharged from hospital, case managers prepare a tailor-made plan for follow-up outpatient treatment. The case manager proactively organizes treatment in accordance with the patient's needs and requirements and mobilizes the resources necessary to achieve this. This entails coordinating the medical and social aspects of the treatment. Case managers therefore act as agents liaising between the various levels of the health- and social-care-system. In particular, case managers are expected to encourage the primary care teams to focus more closely on the specific needs of the individual patient.

Implementation – What has been done?

In 2002 the government of Andalusia resolved to systematically improve care for the chronically ill and people with special needs:

- A law at regional level regulates the conditions and the remuneration for patient-oriented case management.
- The government provided the funding for the gradual implementation of the case management program over the last five years.
- An innovative training program was implemented in which 300 nurses were trained as qualified case managers.
- A case manager was integrated into each of the primary care teams, which in Andalusia also provide home care for the chronically ill and for people with special needs. Each team consists of family doctors, nurses, social workers and physiotherapists and is responsible for 25,000 – 35,000 inhabitants.

Evaluation: Is case management à la Andalusia successful?

As a quasi-experimental study has shown, the project fulfils many of the predefined expectations and aims. After a period of six months and when compared to the control group, the patients in the intervention group showed evidence of:

- higher levels of satisfaction and improved quality of life
- better access to rehabilitation facilities and social services
- less need for home care
- reduced burden on the carers

The number of emergency admission visits did not fall significantly. Also with regard to hospital re-admissions and visits to emergency rooms no differences could be discerned between the intervention group and the control group.

Source: Morales JM et al. Effectiveness of a nurse-led case management in Spanish Primary Health Care model. A quasi-experimental, controlled and multicentric study. BMC Health Services Research 2008; 8: 193

Andalusia – challenges ahead

The Andalusian case management program showed positive outcomes but the following challenges need to be tackled in the future in order to make care for patients with complex conditions even more effective:

- There is still some resistance from professional nursing organizations which needs to be overcome in order to ensure acceptance and continuation of the program in the long-term.
- The program needs to become more active in searching for high-risk patients and more pro-active in managing these patients. Currently, Andalusia is looking at other countries' experiences with case management, eg. the Evercare program in the UK and Kaiser Permanente in the USA.
- The case management program must explore further community resources to reduce the frequency of A & E attendance and hospital re-admissions.

Full report:

Contel Segura, Juan Carlos. Case Management in Andalusia. HealthPolicyMonitor, October 2008. www.hpm.org/survey/es/a12/1

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