

Establishing a National Framework for Geriatric Home Care Practice

PURPOSE

This project seeks to establish a national framework for practice guidelines to shape the provision of home health care for older adults. The overarching goal is to promote the provision of effective, patient-centered care at home that is safe, timely, efficient and equitable.

BACKGROUND

Americans today can expect to live 30 years longer than their great grandparents, causing an enormous shift in the nature of and demand for health care services. Compared to prior generations, people with chronic or disabling conditions today can expect improved quality of life, aided by medical and supportive services ranging from “high tech” interventions to assistance with basic activities of daily living. Recognizing the undeniable preference of individuals to receive care at home, as well as potential savings from reducing reliance on costly hospitalization or nursing home care, policy makers have responded by changing financial incentives to encourage a shift to home-based services. As a result, home health care was the fastest growing category of health spending between 2003 and 2005.

Of the 7.2 million individuals who received home health services in 2000, 69 percent were over 65. This proportion will increase as the impending “age boom” swells the ranks of the “older old.” However, there is no overarching framework to promote consistent national practice guidelines for the provision of high quality, effective home health care to an aging population. Home care agencies, professional and paraprofessional caregivers, families and consumer groups have struggled independently to identify the best practices to promote, maintain and restore the health and independence of older persons who rely on home-based care.

Currently, there is no single source for home health care practitioners to access a common set of evidence-based geriatric practices. Practice in the United States is uneven, and home care agencies are receiving inconsistent “best practices” information from multiple disparate locations. The home health care industry requires a consistent geriatric practice framework on a national level. Once developed, this framework can serve as the necessary touchstone for guiding service delivery to the growing population of older patients who receive care in their homes and communities.

SCOPE

This project aims to:

- Identify gaps in the existing evidence base and practice standards for geriatric home care, as well as resources to address them.
- Achieve national consensus on the most critical areas of geriatric home care that need to be addressed to yield meaningful, sustainable improvements in home-based services for older people.
- Develop and achieve consensus on an evidence-based national framework for geriatric home care practice.

- Raise national awareness and obtain buy-in of a broad range of leaders from the fields of geriatrics, home care, nursing, social work, medicine and paraprofessional services, as well as from the consumer and family caregiver communities.

MAJOR ACTIVITIES

This 16-month project will be guided by a National Advisory Council comprised of national leaders in several fields including experts from nursing, medicine, social work, pharmacy and paraprofessional groups, as well as representatives from consumer and family care giving organizations. Consensus will be developed and awareness built around a national framework providing consistent direction and key priorities for geriatric home care practice. The National Advisory Council will meet face to face and virtually to review findings from information gathering activities, which will include literature reviews, in-depth interviews with key thought leaders, focus groups of patients, family caregivers, frontline nurses, and paraprofessional workers, three Regional Committees, and will commission several white papers. The project will culminate with a national conference at which the framework will be discussed and refined before more widespread national dissemination activities are undertaken.

PROJECT ORGANIZATION

The project is administered by the Center for Home Care Policy and Research at the Visiting Nurse Service of New York. Established in 1993, the Center's threefold mission is: to conduct scientifically rigorous, practice and policy-relevant research on key issues affecting the cost, quality and outcomes of home and community-based services; to provide useful and timely information to key health care decision-makers on issues of national significance; and to serve as a catalyst for constructive change. More information about the Center is available at <http://www.vnsny.org/research/index.html>.

The project is supported by a grant from the John A. Hartford Foundation. Founded in 1929, the Foundation is a committed champion of training, research and service system innovations that promote the health and independence of America's older adults. Through its grant making, the Foundation seeks to strengthen the nation's capacity to provide effective, affordable care to this rapidly increasing older population by educating "aging-prepared" health professionals (physicians, nurses, social workers), and developing innovations that improve and better integrate health and supportive services. The Foundation was established by John A. Hartford. Mr. Hartford and his brother, George L. Hartford, both former chief executives of the Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company, left the bulk of their estates to the Foundation upon their deaths in the 1950s. Additional information about the Foundation and its programs is available at www.jhartfound.org.

For more information contact project staff via email (geriatric.framework@vnsny.org) or phone (212-609-6329).

