Malnutrition Across the Care Continuum in the Aging and Disabled Populations

Author(s): R. Clark, A. Zarutskie, I. Limlek, R. Petty, L. Frieden; TIRR Memorial Hermann

Learning Objective: Assess prevalence of malnutrition in aging and disabled adults in the greater Houston community, and analyze the relationship between previously evaluated barriers to access community resources and malnutrition.

Relevance: The purpose of this study is to evaluate unique barriers that limit the translation of nutrition care plans from clinical to community settings for the aging and disabled populations.

Quality Improvement Process on Which Initiative is Based:
Background: The Independent Living Research Utilization (ILRU) Program has a 40-year history of providing research, education and consultation in the areas of independent living, home and community-based services and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The recognition of the prevalence of malnutrition among inpatients at TIRR (17%) coupled with results of a Houston Livable Communities Survey results in 2018 has spurred a follow-up survey to investigate the prevalence of those at risk of malnutrition in the aging and disabled population in Greater Houston. The research team is led by chief architect of the ADA, Lex Frieden, and Director of National Center for Aging and Disability, Richard Petty, Director and Co-Director of ILRU, respectively. The team includes an economist, medical ethicist, registered dietitian nutritionist, nursing doctoral candidate, physical therapist, and biomedical informaticists.

Plan: Local government agencies co-sponsored a needs assessment to determine barriers to full community participation in the aging and disabled population in disadvantaged communities in Greater Houston in 2018, engaging community members and stakeholders in developing more livable, inclusive communities that minimize social determinants of health.

Do: The needs assessment was developed in a survey format and administered at town hall events in target communities.

Study: 500 complete responses showed unique barriers to transportation, employment, utilization of community resources, accessible housing, and importantly access to healthcare.

Act: The research team has developed a follow-up survey with the same target population to investigate the correlation of established barriers to malnutrition risk, food insecurity, and healthcare-related quality of life using validated questionnaires.

Results / Key Learnings: Expected key learnings from the planned follow-up survey will identify the prevalence of aging and disabled adults at risk of malnutrition within greater Houston. Further, results will help assess potential contributory factors such as dysphagia, food insecurity, limited caregiver support, and transportation.

The research team will utilize the data twofold: To identify existing resources and solidify a clear pathway via a backbone organization to connect individuals to these resources via community-based organizations (CBOs).

Study what community needs are not met with existing resources and develop a strategy address these gaps.

Conclusions: Results from this study will translate to exploration of a patient-centric model to effectively deliver care across the care continuum for the aging and disabled populations.

Implications for Policy or Practice: This project aligns with other national initiatives to shift toward a patient-centric care plan across the care continuum to comprehensively identify, diagnose, treat, and prevent malnutrition. The overall goal is to optimize identification of malnourished patients in the healthcare setting, then align them with clearly identified resources to continue treatment in the community setting and prevent reoccurrence.

Funding Source: None