Effect of a Restorative Model of Posthospital Home Care on Hospital Readmissions

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OBJECTIVES: To compare readmissions of Medicare recipients of usual home care and a matched group of recipients of a restorative model of home care.

DESIGN: Quasiexperimental; matched and unmatched.

SETTING: Community, home care.

PARTICIPANTS: Seven hundred seventy individuals receiving care from a large home care agency after hospitalization.

INTERVENTION: A restorative care model based on principles adapted from geriatric medicine, nursing, rehabilitation, goal attainment, chronic care management, and behavioral change theory.

MEASUREMENTS: Hospital readmission, length of home care episode.

RESULTS: Among the matched pairs, 13.2% of participants who received restorative care were readmitted to an acute hospital during the episode of home care, versus 17.6% of those who received usual care. Individuals receiving the restorative model of home care were 32% less likely to be readmitted than those receiving usual care (conditional odds ratio = 0.68, 95% confidence interval = 0.43–1.08). The mean length of home care episodes was 20.3 ± 14.8 days in the restorative care group and 29.1 ± 31.7 days in the usual care group (P < .001). Results were similar in unmatched analyses.

CONCLUSION: Although statistical significance was marginal, results suggest that the restorative care model offers an effective approach to reducing the occurrence of avoidable readmissions. It was previously shown that the restorative model of home care was associated with better functional recovery, fewer emergency department visits, and shorter episodes of home care. This model could be

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Key words: readmissions; restorative care; home care

A lmost 20% of Medicare beneficiaries are readmitted to an acute hospital within 30 days of discharge.^{1,2} Readmissions increase healthcare costs and lower patient satisfaction.^{3,4} Several provisions of the Affordable Care Act focus on reducing avoidable hospital readmissions.⁵ For example, Section 3026 provides funding for testing models to improve care transitions, Section 3025 mandates reduction in Medicare payments to hospitals based on the rate of 30-day readmissions, and Section 3022 requires accountable care organizations to submit performance data related to readmissions and care transitions.⁵ The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and other agencies in the Department of Health and Human Services are working to identify causes of readmission and to disseminate programs that are effective at reducing avoidable readmissions.⁶

Older age, multiple chronic conditions, and functional limitations are all factors associated with risk of readmission after discharge from an acute hospital stay.^{7,8} One-quarter to one-half of hospitalized older persons experience functional loss during hospitalization, and only one-third recover to prehospital levels of functioning by 3 months.^{9–11} These individuals are at particularly high risk of adverse outcomes, including hospital readmission.^{7,8}

Interventions targeting the hospital discharge process, transitions in care, care coordination, self-management, medication management, and management of specific diseases have been shown to reduce hospital read-missions.^{5,12–22} Many older adults with multiple chronic conditions and functional limitations receive home care services from a Medicare-qualified home care agency after an acute hospital stay. The association between functional

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limitations and risk of readmissions suggests that enhancing functional recovery during episodes of receipt of home care services may offer an additional strategy for reducing the risk of hospital readmission.

The development of a restorative model of home care was previously described, and the effect of this model on older adults receiving an episode of home care from a large home care agency in Connecticut was reported.^{23,24} In that study, which included home care recipients admitted from home, skilled nursing facilities (SNFs), inpatient rehabilitation, and an acute hospital, individuals receiving restorative care were more likely to remain home, less likely to visit an emergency department (ED), and more likely to improve in basic and instrumental activity of daily living (ADLs) functioning and mobility than recipients of usual home care services.²⁴ These better outcomes were in spite of shorter duration of home care episodes.²⁴ The aim of the current study was to compare the frequency of hospital readmissions of recipients of usual home care and the restorative model of home care after an acute hospitalization.

METHODS

Setting and Participants

Participants were individuals receiving home care from a large home care agency in Connecticut. The branch office closest to the investigators served as the restorative care office, and the remaining five offices of the agency served as the usual care offices. All six offices operated under the same administration. Staff at all six offices received the same training in agency policies and procedures. The Yale School of Medicine human investigations committee approved the study.

Eligibility for the original study included age 65 and older; receipt of an episode of nonhospice Medicare-covered home care between November 1, 1998, and April 30, 2000; absence of severe cognitive impairment that would impede ability to participate; and not requiring total assistance with care.²⁴ Random assignment of participants was not possible because of geographic considerations and because individuals needed to be assigned to the next available home care staff. Because the agency staff provided the restorative model of care, an office could not have restorative and usual care participants. Individual prospective matching ensured that participants in the two groups were comparable at baseline.²⁵ A computerized algorithm matched participants from the restorative and usual care offices according to age (within 5 years), gender, race, self-care (basic) activities of daily living (ADLs) function at admission to home care, cognitive status, start date for home care, and whether the participant was admitted to home care following an acute hospitalization.

The 864 participants from the original study who were admitted to home care after discharge from an acute hospital were eligible for the current study. Four participants who died during their home care episode and 90 (10%) for whom the discharge location from home care was unknown were excluded. The study sample of 770 participants included 341 matched pairs and 88 additional participants included in the unmatched analysis but whose match died or had missing outcome data. The agency's nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and home health aide (HHA) staff provided care through all six offices under the approval of participants' physicians.

Restorative Care

The development and implementation of the restorative care strategy is summarized here and described in detail elsewhere.23 The restorative care model was based on principles adapted from geriatric medicine, nursing, rehabilitation, goal attainment, chronic care management, and behavioral change theory.²⁶⁻³⁴ The aim was to reorient home care teams from primarily treating diseases and "taking care of" patients toward working together to maximize function. A multidisciplinary work group of expert home care clinicians familiarized staff with the goal of optimizing patient function, developed methods to assess ADLs and quantify increments of improvement, and focused staff on developing individual functional goals with patients and linking interventions to patients' goals. In developing and testing the restorative care model, Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles³⁵ were followed to operationalize the concept of assessing and maximizing functional independence within episodes of home care; identify structural, process, and attitudinal barriers that impede maximizing functional independence; identify and pilot test solutions to these barriers, refining the approach based on feedback: and implement and test the model with all staff.

The investigators had developed the interventions targeting physical impairments and ADLs in previous home-based programs.^{29,36–38} The treatment plan included various combinations of exercise; behavioral change; self-management; environmental adjustments and adaptive equipment; training and counseling of participant, family, and caregivers; and medication adjustments. A self-care progress report, in which each ADL was divided into subtasks,³⁷ helped to clarify goals, establish a baseline, standardize assessment, clarify care responsibility of providers, and track progress.²³

Important elements of the restorative model are displayed in Table 1. The nurses, physical therapists, and

Clarification of roles and responsibility of providers

Standard assessment of patients; self-care progress report; track progress toward reaching goals

Treatment plans targeting physical impairments and tasks of daily living; behavioral changes; environmental adjustments and adaptive equipment; counseling and support; training of patient, family, and caregivers; and medication adjustments

Table 1. Important Elements of the Restorative Model

 of Home Care

Development and implementation of a unified plan of care based on goal attainment

Establishment of goals based on input from the individual, family, and home care staff; agreement on the process for reaching these goals

Reorganization of the home care staff from individual care providers into an integrated, interdisciplinary team with shared goals

Reorientation of the focus of the home care team from primarily treating diseases and "taking care of" patients toward maximizing selfcare function

HHAs who worked at the intervention office implemented the restorative model. Agency staff who participated in designing the model trained and oversaw these providers. Although different combinations of home care staff were involved for each participant, they reorganized each time from individual care providers into integrated, interdisciplinary teams with shared goals. The goals were established collaboratively with the participant, family, and home care staff.²³ The self-care progress report was started at the time of admission and left in the home to communicate one consistent plan of care between the participant, home care staff, and any other caregivers.

Usual Home Care

No attempt was made to change home care practices in the usual care offices. Although the nurses and therapists made efforts to communicate regularly, their care plans were developed independently. The HHAs performed or helped the participant perform basic and instrumental ADLs.

Descriptive and Outcome Data

All descriptive and outcome data were ascertained using the Outcome and Assessment Information Set (OASIS) version B.³⁹ The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services mandates OASIS for all individuals receiving Medicare services from home care agencies. OASIS must be completed on admission to home healthcare services, transfer to another site of care (e.g., hospital), resumption of care (after a hospital stay), follow-up (at least 60 days), discharge from home health care, and death.⁴⁰ Outcome of the episode of home care was dichotomized as remaining at home or readmission to an acute hospital.

Analysis

Differences in participant characteristics between the matched restorative and usual care groups were assessed using the McNemar test for binary variables and the paired *t*-test for continuous variables. In the primary analysis, pairwise differences in hospital readmission were investigated using conditional logistic regression.⁴¹ Logistic regression, using the entire sample, was used to test the robustness of the matched results. In this confirmatory unmatched analysis, demographic, medical, and functional factors (Table 3) that may confound the relationship between the restorative effect and readmissions were controlled for.

RESULTS

Participant characteristics at the start of the home care episode are reported in Table 2 according to restorative model versus usual care offices. Characteristics are provided for all participants who had been hospitalized before admission to home care and then for the subset of matched pairs. Individuals receiving restorative and usual care were well matched on demographic characteristics, cognition, baseline function, reason for hospitalization, and chronic conditions.

Table 2.	Charac	teristi	ics of	Hom	e Care	Rec	ipients
Cared for	Using	the	Restor	ative	Model	and	Usual
Home Care	e						

	Restorative Model		Usual Care		
Baseline Characteristics	All (n = 410)	Matched Pairs (n = 341)	All (n = 360)	Matched Pairs (n = 341)	
Age, mean \pm standard deviation	77.4 ± 6.7	77.4 ± 6.5	77.0 ± 6.7	77.4 ± 6.5	
Male, n (%)	191 (47)	159 (47)	168 (47)	159 (47)	
Nonwhite, n (%)	15 (4)	12 (4)	14 (4)	12 (4)	
Impaired cognition, n (%)	60 (15)	52 (15)	55 (15)	52 (15)	
Dependence in >1 self-care activity of daily living, n (%)	211 (51)	161 (47)	171 (48)	161 (47)	
Lived alone, n	111 (27)	94 (26)	113 (31)	106 (31)	
Depressed mood, n (%)	64 (16)	53 (16)	65 (18)	60 (18)	
Reason for hospitaliz	zation, n (%)				
Heart failure or other cardiac	110 (27)	87 (25)	94 (27)	94 (27)	
Pneumonia or respiratory	64 (16)	57 (17)	47 (13)	46 (13)	
Stroke or other neurological	11 (3)	10 (3)	11 (3)	10 (3)	
Other ^a	90 (22)	76 (22)	74 (21)	65 (19)	
Chronic conditions, I	า (%)				
Cardiac	288 (70)	233 (68)	247 (69)	236 (69)	
Respiratory	90 (22)	82 (24)	63 (18)	61 (18)	
Diabetes mellitus	89 (22)	73 (22)	90 (26)	84 (26)	
Neurological	29 (7)	24 (7)	25 (7)	23 (7)	
\geq 2 of these categories of chronic conditions	227 (55)	189 (55)	208 (58)	200 (59)	

^a Gastrointestinal, diabetes mellitus, urinary tract infection, injury, musculoskeletal, dehydration, anemia, deep venous thrombosis.

For the matched pairs, 13.2% of restorative model participants were readmitted to an acute hospital during the episode of home care, versus 17.6% of usual care participants. According to the conditional regression analysis, participants receiving the restorative model of home care were 32% less likely to be readmitted than those receiving usual care (odds ratio (OR) = 0.68, 95% confidence interval (CI) = 0.43–1.08) (Table 3). Results were similar in the unmatched analyses (adjusted OR = 0.71, 95% CI = 0.47–1.06) (Table 3).

DISCUSSION

The restorative model of home care was associated with approximately one-third fewer readmissions than usual care. Participants receiving restorative care also had shorter lengths of home care episodes than recipients of usual home care. It was previously reported that restorative care was also associated with greater recovery in function, fewer ED visits, and marginally fewer nursing,

Table 3.	Readmissions	of	Medicare	Beneficiaries
Receiving	Restorative and	Usua	l Home Ca	are

	n/N (%)		Multivariate Odds	
Type of Analysis	Restorative Usual Care Care		<i>P</i> - Value	Ratio (95% Confidence Interval) ^a	
Matched pairs $(n = 341)$	45/341 (13.2)	60/341 (17.6)	.10	0.68 (0.43–1.08)	
Unmatched analysis (n = 770 participants)	53/410 (12.9)	62/360 (17.2)	.09	0.71 (0.47–1.06)	

^a Conditional logistic used for matched analysis and logistic regression for unmatched analysis. Matching factors were age, sex, race, self-care in basic activity of daily living (ADL) function at admission to home care, date of home care episode, and length of home care episode. Unmatched multivariate analysis adjusted for age, sex, race, living alone, functional status (number of basic and instrumental ADL dependencies), cognitive impairment, depression, reason for hospitalization, number of chronic conditions, and length of the home care.

^b Mean lengths of home care episodes were 20.3 ± 14.8 (interquartile range 11-24) and 29.1 ± 31.7 (interquartile range 13-34) days in the restorative and usual care groups, respectively (Student t = 4.644, P < .001).

physical therapy, and HHA visits.²⁴ The implementation of the restorative care model by the home care staff rather than by research staff supports the feasibility of integrating the model into episodes of home care.

Previous interventions that have been shown to be effective at reducing readmissions have focused on improving the hospital discharge process or the transition from hospital to home.^{5,12–19} Other interventions have addressed management of diseases or prevention of events such as medication error.^{20,21,42} Restorative care complements these strategies.

As with all practice change interventions, the mechanisms of effect probably were multiple. Attitudinal change on the part of home care staff and recipients and improved functional performance from the training and from systematic assessment probably contributed. These results corroborate those of the Outcome-based Quality Improvement demonstration project, in which hospitalization rates for home care recipients decreased more than 20% over 3 years.⁴³ Using continuous quality improvement methods, the authors regularly fed back functional and other outcome data to home care agencies, suggesting that the systematic assessment of functional outcomes contributed to reduced hospitalization.⁴³

As with most care models, the restorative model is not appropriate for all home care recipients. To focus on individuals who were likely to benefit, individuals who were completely functionally dependent or were very cognitively impaired were excluded. The exclusion of very frail and cognitively impaired individuals probably at least partially explains the lower readmission rate seen in this study than the national Medicare average of 27% for home care recipients.⁴⁴

This study has limitations. It involved a single home care agency. Although there was a mix of urban and sub-

urban, most participants were white. There have been small replications;⁴⁵ broader replication in diverse settings is warranted. The possibility cannot be excluded that the shorter length of the home care episode accounted for some of the differences in readmission rates, but it is unlikelv that this is the total explanation because episode length was accounted for in analyses and because the restorative model recipients ended their episodes more functionally capable than usual care recipients. The study was conducted several years ago. Although eligibility for Medicare-covered home care remains the same, there have been payment and regulatory changes. For example, implementation of the prospective payment system for episodes of home care occurred in 2000, during this study, and was accounted for in the matching algorithm.⁴⁶ Recent efforts to improve the quality of home care and to focus on functional outcomes may have led to interval changes in usual home care practices.²² Although institution of more functional-based quality measures might have resulted in better attention to function, Home Health Compare still shows that only approximately half of home care recipients improve in activities such as bathing, walking, and transferring from bed.44 These results suggest that the restorative model will benefit current home care recipients.

Neither the participants nor staff was randomized to receive restorative care, raising the possibility of bias and confounding. Bias was minimized by prospective matching of participants in the restorative care and usual care offices and by controlling for other confounders of readmission in multivariate analysis, although the possibility of unmeasured confounding cannot be eliminated. Readmission rates before the study were not available, but the duration of home care episodes were similar in the year before the study albeit markedly shorter in the restorative care than the usual care group during the study.²⁴ The possibility cannot be excluded that more restorative than usual care recipients were rehospitalized after the home care episode, but this is unlikely because restorative care recipients completed home care more functionally capable than usual care recipients. Location after the home care episode was missing for 10% of the eligible sample. A higher number of usual care than restorative care participants had missing home care discharge location. Finally, the small sample size resulted in marginal statistical significance (i.e., the CIs included 1).

Results of this study have practice and policy implications. The reduction in hospital readmissions and ED visits, coupled with shorter episodes of home care, support the cost-effectiveness of the restorative model. The average cost of a readmission was \$7,200 in 2005.⁴ The 15 fewer readmissions in the restorative than usual care group translates to \$108,000 in 2005 Medicare dollars saved in the study sample. More than 18% of the almost 14 million hospital admissions of Medicare beneficiaries in 2008 incurred a readmission within 30 days.^{1,2} Even a modest reduction in readmissions or ED visits in the subset of home care recipients who are cognitively and functionally able to participate in the restorative model would result in substantial Medicare savings.

The restorative care model is an efficient use of existing resources. The nurses, therapists, and HHAs already care for these participants. Restorative care would not require adding or superimposing additional services but rather would entail realigning the activities of the existing home care staff.

This realignment is beneficial to the home care workforce, particularly the HHAs. The Institute of Medicine and others have recommended enhancing work satisfaction and career advancement of HHAs.⁴⁷ Training and certification in restorative care offers such an opportunity. Evolution to an active role for HHAs in facilitating self-care and functional recovery will require supervision and monitoring by nurses, physical therapists, or occupational therapists. These professionals are already involved in the home care episode, so there would not be additional expenses.

Restorative care could be integrated into emerging models of care delivery such as accountable care organizations and medical homes. Bundled payments also offer opportunities to improve care and outcomes during hospitalization and the posthospital period. Emerging care-delivery innovations, which focus on continuity, coordination, and integration across providers and settings, increasingly make home care processes and outcomes the responsibility of all healthcare providers.

The enhanced functional recovery seen with the restorative model would bestow several benefits upon older adults. The lower risk of readmission would alleviate the spiraling functional decline seen with recurrent hospitalizations. The improved functioning would decrease or delay the need for long-term care services at home or in SNFs, additional sources of healthcare savings. Enhanced selfcare abilities also lessen the care burden on family and other informal caregivers.

The restorative model offers a potentially effective approach to reducing the occurrence of avoidable readmissions, particularly in older adults with multiple conditions and functional limitations, a group at high risk of readmission. The restorative model bestows benefits on patients, caregivers, and home care providers while reducing avoidable healthcare utilization. This model could be incorporated into usual home care practices and care delivery redesign.

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