

CASE IN POINT

Leading the Care Coordination Team with Knowledge, News and Learning

BOTTOM LINE IMPACT

Optimizing 24-Hour Nurse Line and Care Management Programs

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Telephonic nurse programs have been around since the late 1960s, but only in the past decade have most major health plans, hospitals and provider systems adopted 24-hour telephonic nurse lines to enhance patient access and improve outcomes. In a time when instant gratification is generally unavailable in the healthcare system, this program fills a gap for patients needing immediate answers.

Telephonic nurse lines serve patients by providing both “nurse triage” to individuals who have medical symptoms requiring immediate attention, as well as “nurse advice” to provide callers immediate access to healthcare professionals for their health questions. Effective nurse triage and nurse advice interventions not only benefit patients who receive immediate attention and customized feedback, but their providers and insurers also reap the advantage of improved clinical outcomes and cost savings. As part of a comprehensive approach to care management, nurse line programs offer another vehicle to provide valuable access to health professionals and information that can optimize outcomes.

IMPROVED COST SAVINGS, CLOSER INTERACTION

Whether it's unresolved questions keeping someone up at night, frightening symptoms or just general questions that a physician didn't have time for during a routine office visit, these programs are a win for everyone – patients, families, providers, employers and insurers all benefit from an effective and efficient nurse triage pro-

gram. Cost savings are attainable through fewer unnecessary and expensive visits to the emergency room, fewer office visits and a lower chance of readmission to a hospital after discharge. At the same time, access to a nurse line provides patients with sound customized advice and a sense of connection to their providers when the offices are closed.

The advancement of computer technology has helped the nurse triage concept thrive by giving nurses access to evidence-based guidelines with the ability

"TELEPHONIC NURSE LINE PROGRAMS SERVE AS A VALUABLE TOOL FOR PROMOTING PATIENT SATISFACTION AND OPTIMAL PATIENT OUTCOMES EVEN AS A STANDALONE PROGRAM."

to input the caller's information, analyze the situation in real-time, customize the advice back to the caller, and document each call. The triage process involves identifying the patient's symptoms to determine the severity of illness or injury so the patient can be guided to receive the right care at the right time in the right place. Nurses follow a set of evidence-based and nationally recognized protocols guiding them through standardized questions to help deliver consistent and safe outcomes. These guidelines help the nurse filter the patient's symptoms to determine the severity of illness or injury so the caller has actionable information concerning his or her medical concerns.

CREATING TAILORED FITS FOR PATIENTS

In the program at Alicare Medical Management, we are also able to integrate our “24x7 Nurse HelpLine” information with our other care management programs, making it possible to be available to patients and reach out to them at all points throughout the continuum of care. Case managers know that the most significant impact on health and financial outcomes can be attained by proactively focusing on the health needs of any popu-


lation's highest utilizers. For these patients in particular – the most frequent users of health resources – easy access to healthcare advice at their fingertips is most likely to result in patient satisfaction and best outcomes. By integrating the information available in telephonic nurse triage with the case management information, both the case manager and the triage nurse can enhance the experience for the patient and generate the optimal outcomes.

To give you an idea of how this integration can benefit the patient, a caller to the Nurse HelpLine with diabetes or other chronic condition may be referred to our disease management health coaches. New parents in our maternity man-

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agement program can call the Nurse HelpLine for pregnancy advice throughout the pregnancy and for postpartum screening and parental advice after the baby is born. When a patient is referred to the emergency room for a hospital admission, a referral to our utilization management nurses can help ease the registration process. Frequent callers to the NurseLine can be referred to readmission management or case manage-

ment programs to help focus on the root causes of the patient issues.

Telephonic nurse line programs serve as a valuable tool for promoting patient satisfaction and optimal patient outcomes even as a standalone program. When integrated with other care management programs, these programs can become a critical resource to support a comprehensive approach to engaging patients throughout the continuum of care. 



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