

Senior ASSIST:

Bridging a Gap in Services for the Community-Dwelling Elderly

The Challenge:

Frail, elderly individuals are at risk for adverse health outcomes, hospitalizations and premature nursing home placement. Those still living at home but not qualifying for home health care via Medicare need higher care levels than typically provided through outpatient physician visits.

The Goal:

Help the frail elderly deal with multiple medical problems, cognitive impairment and the lack of support systems so that they can avoid hospitalizations and continue to live safely in their own homes.

An Innovative Solution:

Senior ASSIST (Assisting Seniors to Stay Independent through Services and Teaching)

Where To Learn More

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What It Is

- A program under which a geriatric-trained registered nurse care manager makes home visits for comprehensive assessments and follow-up care.
- Funded by The Nebraska Medical Center, a partner of the University of Nebraska Medical Center, as a service to the community.

What It Does

- Provides individualized, ongoing instruction in self-care, including how to take medications, home safety, nutrition and more. Nurses collaborate with physicians, report changes in condition, assess response to treatment and refer clients to other community resources to strengthen the support system.
- Focuses on management of chronic illness and on long-term continuity, rather than episodes of care.
- Length of stay in the program is measured in years; some clients have been served continuously since the program began in 1998. (In the program's first ten years, more than 21,000 home visits were made to 503 clients.)
- Key points of client satisfaction (as measured via questionnaires mailed regularly to clients) include:
 - 97% would recommend the service to others;
 - 91% were highly satisfied with their health care;
 - 95% reported the nurse helped get services essential to staying in their homes;
 - 92% said health care services were coordinated;
 - 94% reported they were taught about medications and diet; and
 - 90% believed their health was improved through Senior ASSIST.

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- Key points of physician satisfaction (as measured via questionnaires mailed to physicians) include:
 - 95% saw program as beneficial to their patients;
 - 92% said the program helped patients appropriately enter and use the health care system; and
 - 78% found patients were better able to self-manage their care.
- Clients experienced fewer hospitalizations and emergency room visits after being in the program for six months (as compared to six months prior to admission to Senior ASSIST):
 - 63% decrease in hospitalizations;
 - 46% decrease in ER visits; and
 - 62% dollar savings to the health care system.