Delivering Social Work Services to Multiple Sclerosis patients through Videoconferencing Technology.

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Introduction:

Access to social work services for Multiple Sclerosis (MS) patients, may not appear as the “most effective” use of time for disabled patients. Primarily, because this population may not understand the benefits of working with a social worker during their disease process. In addition, patients with advance multiple sclerosis may require the assistance of another person, i.e. caregiver to attend outpatient visits. As a result, patients often try to avoid going to a medical center for care and most often neglect seeking social work services because they may not perceive that they have “social work needs.” However, social workers within a healthcare system address the bio-psychosocial needs of complex patients, which include coordinating, monitoring, evaluating and advocating on behalf of the patient and/or his family to facilitate appropriate services. Galushko (2011) found that patients desired one concrete well-informed person whom they could contact if they felt lost. Videoconferencing technology is an effective way to address patients’ social work needs while reducing barriers to benefits and services. Understanding the benefits and use of videoconferencing technology for direct social work practice from patients home will improve access to care, minimize complications of medical needs and facilitate ongoing psychosocial rehabilitation.

Methods:

Patients are educated about the use of videoconference technology to home and the benefits of having a face-to-face contact with interdisciplinary providers in the comfort of their homes. Patients are screened for home tele-health and access to a computer and webcam. Our tele-health coordinator assists patients with downloading secured videoconferencing software and set-up initial appointment. Social work appointments and interventions are offered to patients who would require outpatient or in-home visits for psychosocial assessments, annual evaluations, coordination of care or other case management services. Patient and social work provider are joined through technology face to face in real-time..

Results:

Patients who have access to videoconferencing technology have verbalized satisfaction with receiving social work services in the comfort of their homes. This has been an effective method to accessible, comprehensive and inclusive care to patients and their families. Patients who have videoconferencing technology to home have participated in MS support groups, received counseling on advance directives, completed annual evaluations, received home based primary care social work services, assistance with pension compensation applications and case management

Conclusion:

As the MS disease process advances, the need to connect patient with specialized care is imperative. The use of videoconferencing technology to provide social work and case management services is an innovative method to provide cost effective accessible health care to patients. There are many benefits to providing social work services from the home setting, i.e. access to their personal information, bank statements, children’s social security cards etc. without having to bring those documents into a hospital setting. Family members can also participate in sessions with permission of patient. Social workers are able to observe patient in their home environment, which also provides a different perspective into the patient’s life and social functioning. Exploring how to maintain confidentiality while providing videoconferencing interventions to patient should be explored individually.

References :
Galushko, Maren; Golla, Heidrun. (2011) Unmet Needs of Patients Feeling Severely Affected by Multiple Sclerosis in Germany: A Qualitative Study. Journal of Palliative Medicine. Mar2014, Vol. 17 Issue 3, p274-281.