

Facilitating Health Behavior Change in Homebound Seniors

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Brief Description:

Nutrition/Diabetes education is a collaborative process through which people with diabetes, at risk for diabetes, or with other nutrition related chronic disease states gain knowledge and skills to modify behavior and successfully manage disease. Dietitian and volunteer Dietetic students provide counsel and support in facilitating client directed behavior change in the homebound senior population.

This submission was selected as part of a national challenge issued to leaders in all communities seeking new “best practices” and “best possibilities” for the future of nutrition and aging.

The Meals on Wheels, Inc. (MOWI) Healthy Aging and Independent Living (HAIL) initiative has proven to be a successful community-campus partnership and provide the necessary foundation for developing a model that addresses critical community health issues among homebound elderly. The HAIL initiative is funded by the United Way of Tarrant County and supports innovative strategies and services that “help older adults with chronic disease and their caregivers learn to live well, in the community, for a longer period of time.” This community-wide initiative is intended to help identify effective ways to impact the ever-increasing demands on the community’s economy and infrastructure due to increased health care costs as a result of growth in the older demographic.

The MOWI HAIL program is aimed at self-management of health-related behaviors and includes diabetes and nutrition counseling as strategies for older adults in avoiding institutional placement and decreasing healthcare costs. Involving nutrition student volunteers in the HAIL program has allowed MOWI to expand their outreach and client services for the purpose of improving nutritional health outcomes and decrease diabetes and related complications for seniors living in the community.

According to the American Association of Diabetes Educators, “diabetes education, also known as diabetes self-management training (DSMT) or diabetes self-management education (DSME), is defined as a collaborative process through which people with or at risk for diabetes gain the knowledge and skills needed to modify behavior and

successfully self-manage the disease and its related conditions.” This model can easily be applied to persons with other chronic conditions, such as congestive heart failure, or to decrease incidence of other causes of preventable hospitalizations, such as dehydration.

Through nutrition and diabetes/diabetes risk screening, MOWI clients are identified for visits by MOWI registered dietitians. Nutrition and diabetes management assessments are performed during in-home visits; initial education is provided; and a learning plan is developed. Based on the AADE7™ self-care behavior model, HAIL project educators work with clients to set behavior goals during their initial home visit. During subsequent months, nutrition student volunteers contact MOWI clients via telephone to reinforce education provided during the home visit, provide additional education in accordance with the learning plan, and encourage and reinforce behavior goals achievement. MOWI clients self-report behavior goal achievement “all of the time” to “none of the time.” Overall behavior change was reported in approximately 89% of clients who responded to follow-up phone consults. Fifty-one percent of clients reported that they achieved their pre-determined goals “all of the time,” and 38% of clients achieved goals “most of the time” or “some of the time.”

By providing meaningful information appropriate to individual clients as determined by seeing a client in their own home, encouraging clients to set and achieve positive health-related behavior changes, preventable hospitalizations and emergency department can be decreased in the homebound elderly population.

A poster presentation of this MOWI program has been accepted at the American Association of Diabetes Educators annual meeting in August, 2012.