Implementation of Educational and Referral Programs in Community Pharmacies to Assist Medicare Beneficiaries with Limited Income

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BACKGROUND

- Community pharmacists are well positioned to easily identify patients struggling to afford their medications who could be eligible for limited income subsidy programs and then refer them to Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs) or the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) for benefits screening.
- The Certified Aging Resource Educated Specialist (C.A.R.E.S.) Program was developed to increase pharmacists’ awareness of available programs for patients with limited income and integrate an efficient referral process into the pharmacy workflow.
- The C.A.R.E.S. Program (https://alpharmacycares.org/) is a partnership between the Auburn University Harrison School of Pharmacy and the Alabama Department of Senior Services, and has recruited pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, and pharmacy students to participate on a voluntary basis since it was developed in 2015.

OBJECTIVES

- To describe the C.A.R.E.S. Program in terms of 1) pre-post assessment of knowledge, 2) participant satisfaction, and 3) outputs.

METHODS

- An educational program including two ACPE accredited continuing pharmacy education (CPE) courses was developed in partnership with the Alabama Department of Senior Services:
  - Introductory Written Article (0.1 CEU)
    1. Identify problems experienced by Medicare patients with limited income
    2. Provide an overview of assistance programs for Medicare patients with limited income
    3. Describe the role and responsibilities of Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs)
  - Comprehensive asynchronous online video training (0.3 CEU)
    1. Overview of Medicare and the Enrollment Period
    2. Medicare Basics: Parts A, B, and C
    3. Medicare Basics Part D
    4. Programs for Medicare Beneficiaries with Limited-Income
    5. Limited Income Newly Eligible Transition (LI NET) Program
    6. ADSS and ADRCs
    7. Assisting Medicare Beneficiaries
- The program was offered to pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, and pharmacy students in Alabama at no cost.
- Measures included a six item pre and post-assessment of knowledge as well as a post-program survey to collect participant satisfaction and demographics.
- The first 16 individuals who completed the 0.3 CEU comprehensive course passed the training with a score of 80% or higher with three attempts allowed. The feedback from these individuals was used to revise the questions as the training was finalized and made available to the remaining 54 individuals.
- Upon completion of the 0.3 CEU online training, pharmacies were eligible to enroll in the C.A.R.E.S. Pharmacy Network and receive the C.A.R.E.S. referral kit including 30 referral cards and pre-stamped envelopes addressed to the Alabama Department of Senior Services (ADSS)

RESULTS

- The mean pre-comprehensive program knowledge score was 70.7%, which improved to 96.0% (p<0.001) after completion of the comprehensive program.
- The majority of participants reported positive assessments of both the introductory and comprehensive programs.
- After at least one full time pharmacist’s completion of the three-hour training, a total of 25 pharmacies elected to enroll in the C.A.R.E.S. Pharmacy Network. Between these pharmacies, a total of 86 patients have been referred for benefits screening. These referrals have impacted the lives of numerous Medicare patients.
- Pharmacists are well positioned to identify and refer Medicare patients with limited income to get assistance. An educational program and referral network are feasible methods of equipping pharmacists and pharmacy technicians with the knowledge and means to provide long-term solutions for Medicare beneficiaries.
- Other states may consider replicating this partnership in order to develop similar programs to benefit their Medicare beneficiaries with limited income.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication has been created or produced by the local Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) with financial assistance, in whole or in part, through a grant from the Administration for Community Living (ACL).