E-Poster

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Rehabilitation Intensity and Length of Stay Following Spinal Cord Injury: Perspectives of People With Lived Experience and Care Partners

Topic: Rehabilitation Across the Continuum of Care

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BACKGROUND

The quality of care received during post-acute rehabilitation is critical for people with spinal cord injuries (SCI) to return to community living and experience optimal quality of life. Two significant changes in rehabilitation delivery during the past 30 years in the United States affected length of stay (LOS) and rehabilitation intensity, including decreases in LOS and growth of subacute rehabilitation in skilled nursing facilities. This study sought the perspectives of people with SCI and care partners regarding their rehabilitation experiences and preparation for community reintegration as part of an international study across 5 countries and healthcare systems. We sought to identify the shared and distinctive perspectives of people with SCI and care partners.

METHODS

We recruited people with lived experience and care partners in the United States through SCI Model Systems contacts and other sources. We sought variations in injury and demographic characteristics and rehabilitation providers. We conducted two focus groups lasting 90 minutes for each stakeholder group separately. A moderator used a semi-structured list of topics, including rehabilitation goals, usefulness of therapies, suitability of LOS, and preparation for discharge. Transcript coding was informed by the questions guiding the study and followed a qualitative, thematic analysis. Investigators identified themes through deductive and inductive analyses. Two investigators coded transcripts independently and a third investigator helped reconcile discrepancies.

RESULTS

The nine participants with SCI (female-male ratio 4:5) were between 19 and 73 years old and sustained injuries 4 to 48 years earlier. The 11 care partners (6:5) were between 27 and 69 years old and provided care from 1 to 10 years. Analysis of the transcript from people with SCI yielded themes related to experiences during inpatient rehabilitation, home and community reintegration, balancing loss and acceptance, managing accessibility barriers, strength of relationships, and transitions to community living. They described both positive and negative experiences with specific facilities, therapies, and clinicians. Topics unique to care partners were the nature of their involvement during inpatient rehabilitation, services that they found helpful or not, and the extent to which they felt prepared for discharge.

CONCLUSION

Participants receiving rehabilitation in specialty programs reported more favorable experiences and better discharge preparation than those receiving rehabilitation in less specialized programs. Care partners reported training and resource needs to prepare for community transition. Regardless of how prepared participants felt at discharge, all encountered challenges that they did not anticipate.

Statement of Disclosures

None

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