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Reducing Behavior-Based Missed Hemodialysis Treatments

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Hemodialysis (HD) patients not receiving their full prescribed treatment or complete treatment schedule have been associated with a higher mortality risk. We examined the missed treatment rate and performed a root cause analysis for missed treatments in 11 North Carolina HD centers. We then provided focused patient education and individualized social work interventions for a period of 12 months to reduce the rate of missed treatments. This education focused on the impact of patient non-adherence on their health and included interventions such as teaching patients relaxation techniques, providing direction for substance abuse treatment, or solving scheduling issues within the clinic. Centers also offered rescheduled appointments when a treatment was missed. Our assessment found that "problems adjusting to their treatment lifestyle" was the top self-reported reason for missed treatments within a patient's control. Previously diagnosed mental health issues were also common in patients who frequently missed treatments. Of the patients who received a Social Work intervention, missed treatments were reduced or eliminated in 71% of patients. The overall missed treatment reschedule rate doubled from 0.35% of total treatments in the clinics during July 2007 to 0.68% in June 2008. In June 2008, the combined missed treatment rate for non-adherence was 1.77% compared to a baseline rate of 4.22% in July 2007. Social work intervention reduced the rate of missed treatments and improved the reschedule rate. This improved patient adherence, especially in patients deemed "unreachable," was a key component to improving treatment outcomes and decreasing mortality thus highlighting the valuable role of social workers within the interdisciplinary dialysis team.

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