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Dialysis and The Undocumented: Overcoming Barriers to Care

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The development and purpose of the Compassionate Care Program (CCP) is to address dialysis care needs for undocumented patient with End Stage Kidney Disease (ESKD). The overall goal is to improve access to care and quality of life for these patients while decreasing morbidity and mortality.

There are an estimated 8,500 undocumented immigrants with kidney failure in the U.S. Due to their undocumented status, they are ineligible for government support medical benefits which includes thrice weekly outpatient dialysis services. Typically, these patients utilize emergency dialysis to address their care needs. Not only do the patients struggle to receive adequate care, but emergency room physicians report experiencing emotional distress as they perceive the patients' care to be unjust, unethical, and substandard. The CCP was created to serve undocumented ESKD residents of Kansas without access to dialysis care. Once accepted into the program, these patients receive dialysis 2-3 times per week at the organization's inpatient dialysis department. A protocol was created for a streamlined process to identify and assess the patient in the emergency department (ED) to receive dialysis treatment. Following treatment, patients are transferred back to the ED for medical clearance and determination of next steps. Once medically stable, patients are transitioned to an outpatient facility with specific days and times to receive dialysis paid for by the CCP. The CCP was implemented in February 2019 and has grown to support 30 patients. Of those 30, 21 receive care in outpatient dialysis facility. For CCP patients' visits, the organization has seen a reduction in ED visits by 94%, admissions by 52%, and other outpatient services by 71%. In 2 years, the organization has seen an overall cost reduction of 47%. Noting additional successes of the program, 57% report they are currently employed, 76% have primary care services, 19% have obtained health insurance, and of those insured, 2 are on the kidney transplant list. The CCP addresses core healthcare inadequacies for undocumented patients with ESKD. This program supports an improved quality of life for patients while decreasing emergency services utilization and risk of caregiver distress.

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