

Psychosocial Readiness Assessment for Heart Transplant Candidates

Abstract

Background: Psychosocial evaluation for heart transplant suitability has long been required by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services as a condition of participation for transplant programs in the United States. There is no regulation regarding follow-up psychosocial care and re-assessment of patients waitlisted for transplantation. Heart transplant candidates require a thorough initial evaluation of multiple psychosocial factors and are at risk of negative outcomes with mental health problems and/or unstable socioeconomic resources.

Purpose: A descriptive surveillance quality improvement project was developed and implemented to evaluate the effects of psychosocial readiness assessments for waitlisted United Network for Organ Sharing status 3, 4, and 5 adult heart transplant candidates in the outpatient setting, addressing basic socioeconomic needs and mental wellness in preparation for transplantation.

Methods: To determine acceptability and accessibility, rescheduled readiness visits and no-show rates were measured. A post-implementation period Qualtrics^{RM} survey was administered to measure team member perceptions of feasibility. Socioeconomic elements of caregiver support, housing, transportation, and insurance coverage status was assessed by simple using “yes/no” questions. The General Anxiety Disorder-7 questionnaire (GAD-7) was used to assess anxiety. Depression was evaluated using the Patient Health Questionnaire-8 (PHQ-8) screening form.

Results: 57 patients were assessed during the 12-week period. The primary aim of feasibility was achieved with 93% of visits performed with freedom from rescheduling or patient no-show to the scheduled visit. 75% of team members reported the readiness assessments were feasible to complete. 24.56% of patients required follow-up from a transplant Social Worker with 94.74% of those referrals due to elevated mental health questionnaire scores alone.

Conclusion: Addressing non-medical and mental health needs in waitlisted heart transplant patients allows transplant programs to maintain candidates with necessary resources and care. The readiness assessments are feasible in practice and may serve to reduce untoward outcomes in the post-transplant phase by providing targeted care prior to the time of transplant.

Keywords: heart transplant, psychosocial assessment, readiness, socioeconomic, mental health