7-Day Pledge: Reducing hospital readmissions through rapid connections to primary care

Quality Improvement Brief
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What we know about the link between primary care follow-up and hospital readmissions

In the United States, one in 12 people are readmitted to the hospital within 30 days of their initial discharge. These readmissions add $16 billion to healthcare costs annually, and yet an estimated one-quarter of them are preventable.\(^1\)

Inadequate post-discharge follow-up is a key contributor to preventable readmissions. Timely primary care follow-up can help reduce readmission risk by providing patients with the medication reconciliation, discharge plan review, and education needed to support a smooth care transition.\(^2,3\) However, inability to schedule timely appointments, past experiences with healthcare providers, lack of understanding about the value of primary care follow-up, and type of insurance can all affect whether patients have access to primary care after leaving the hospital.\(^4,6\)

About the 7-Day Pledge

The Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers’ citywide 7-Day Pledge program, launched in 2014, addresses common barriers to rapid primary care follow-up. Using data from Cooper University Health Care, Jefferson Health’s three New Jersey hospitals, Lourdes Health System, and Virtua Health stored in the Camden Coalition Health Information Exchange, we identify admitted patients who are eligible for participation in the 7-Day Pledge. We meet patients at the hospital bedside or talk over the phone to schedule an appointment within seven days of estimated hospital discharge. Staff also make reminder calls, arrange transportation to and from primary care offices, and provide a $20 gift card once patients complete the follow-up.

To cover the providers’ costs incurred by prioritizing these patients, the 7-Day Pledge offers enhanced reimbursement above the standard or value-based payment. Providers currently receive $100 for every completed appointment within seven days. Staff and providers regularly meet to discuss 7-Day Pledge data and programmatic improvement. We currently partner with primary care providers in and around Camden, including: CAMcare, Cooper Ambulatory Pediatrics, Cooper Internal Medicine, Cooper Family Medicine, Fairview Village Family Practice, Osborn Family Health Center, Project H.O.P.E., Reliance Medical Group, and Virtua Primary Care.

Our question

Does having a primary care appointment within seven days of leaving the hospital lower the number of readmissions at 30 and 90 days after discharge?
Our evaluation

We compared patients who had a primary care follow-up within seven days with similar patients who had a later or no follow-up, using propensity score matching. This technique helped us make the two groups more comparable by controlling for some of the factors that predict both timing of a primary care follow-up and readmitting to the hospital. Specifically, the similarities we looked for were age, sex, race/ethnicity, physical illness severity, substance-related diagnoses, mental health-related diagnoses, and emergency department and hospital utilization in the six months prior to enrolling in the 7-Day Pledge. Our evaluation examined 1531 eligible records for discharges from local hospitals occurring between January 1, 2014 and April 30, 2016.

Implications for policy and practice

Return on investment is achievable. To ensure a successful transition from hospital to home, the 7-Day Pledge provides patient support and builds strong relationships with Camden primary care practices. Like other care transition interventions, the 7-Day Pledge is resource intensive. However, cost analysis suggests that with each avoided hospitalization saving $10,300, the 7-Day Pledge would break even annually once 27 hospitalizations were avoided. This would happen when approximately 208 patients completed primary care follow-up appointments within seven days of hospital discharge.

Systemic barriers remain and limit program effectiveness. Camden, NJ, is a city with deeply-rooted poverty. Camden's Medicaid patients face language barriers, lack of social support, competing priorities, unstable housing, mistrust of the healthcare system, and other social factors that influence health and decisions to seek care. All of these factors influence program performance. Without sustained efforts to relieve residents of these burdens, the program's influence on readmissions will be limited.

Building on what we learned

The Camden Coalition will continue evaluating the 7-Day Pledge. Our next step is to identify subgroups of the population who would benefit most—and least—from facilitated connection to primary care upon leaving the hospital. Answering this question will allow us to adjust the program to ensure we provide the best care possible to the people who need it most.
About the Camden Coalition

The Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers is a multidisciplinary nonprofit organization working to improve care for people with complex health and social needs in Camden, NJ and across the country. The Camden Coalition works to advance the field of complex care by implementing evidence-based interventions and piloting new models that address chronic illness and social barriers to health and wellbeing. Supported by strong data, cross-sector convening, and shared learning, our community-based programs deliver better care to the most vulnerable individuals in Camden and beyond.

Learn more about the 7-Day Pledge at https://www.camdenhealth.org/7-day-pledge. Learn more about the Camden Coalition at www.camdenhealth.org.

Acknowledgements

The 7-Day Pledge's success is based on the hard work of primary care practices throughout Camden and the surrounding areas, including: CAMcare, Cooper Ambulatory Pediatrics, Cooper Internal Medicine, Cooper Family Medicine, Fairview Village Family Practice, Osborn Family Health Center, Project H.O.P.E., Reliance Medical Group, and Virtua Primary Care. We also partner with Cooper University Health Care, Jefferson Health's three New Jersey hospitals, Lourdes Health System, and Virtua Health through the Camden Coalition Health Information Exchange, which provides us with the data we need to run the 7-Day Pledge.

The Camden Coalition's Community Advisory Committee, which is composed of Camden residents, was instrumental in promoting the 7-Day Pledge to patients and providers.

The original article upon which this quality improvement brief is based is: Wiest D, Yang Q, Wilson C, Dravid N. Outcomes of a citywide campaign to reduce Medicaid hospital readmissions with connection to primary care within 7 days of hospital discharge. JAMA Netw Open. 2019;2(1):e187369. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2018.7369. This brief was prepared by Teagan Kuruna in consultation with the study authors.

References


