

Critical Support Reduces Burden of Disease and Improves Outcomes

For one member with epilepsy, the long-term support and follow-up by the Accordant nurse markedly impacted the wellbeing of the entire family, while also ensuring the most proactive **utilization of health care services to lower cost and ensure the path to recovery was feasible. The young member had been initially hospitalized after contracting viral meningitis. The attending physician suspected that this was the cause of epilepsy, which affected the temporal, parietal, and frontal cortex portions of the brain.** The member ultimately had recovered and had been discharged home. The member's mother had relied on weekly support from the Accordant nurse at that time, after expressing that the discharge support from the hospital was minimal. **Due to extenuating family circumstances, the burden of care for this member and a younger sibling fell entirely to the mother.**

The importance of good caregiver health and support has been well-documented in several studies.¹⁻³ It is well-recognized that chronic illness can place undue strain on not just the member, but caregivers and family members, as well. When caregivers are emotionally supported and empowered — through education, access to resources, and outside support — they are better able to invest their energy in securing the best health outcomes for the family member to whom they provide care. Research shows that this enables a more positive health outcome for the caregiver (lower rates of depression or anxiety), lower utilization of health care services related to coping, and improved health outcomes for the family member to whom they provide care, as well.¹ At Accordant, a holistic, hands-on approach is an essential component of overall care and support. For our members and their families, this approach extends far beyond just the member and a specific chronic condition, because other care concerns can be just as important on the pathway to overall wellness and improved health outcomes.

About one year later, the member experienced a marked increase in seizures, reported as “hundreds per day” as well as one grand mal seizure. The member’s physician had planned another surgery in 2-3 weeks to remove additional portions of the member’s brain to reduce the frequency of seizures. The member's mother was concerned about the arrangements for this surgery, as the hospital was approximately one hour from their home. She had planned to sleep in a chair in the member's room for the entire three weeks of the hospitalization, but was worried about paying almost \$20 a day to park, which would easily exceed \$300 for the entire stay. Due to the member's highly specialized treatment, there had been many specialists and other providers involved in the care, and the member's mother had been unable to fully handle the health care costs. She felt that even this parking expense would prevent her from paying bills and doing other things critical to the wellness of the entire family, including purchasing the member's epilepsy medications.

The Accordant nurse provided emotional support and researched options to assist the family. The nurse recognized that caregiver support is often essential to member wellness and she also appreciated that easing some of the mother's stress (financially and emotionally) would better position her to care for the member, herself, and the younger sibling at home.

Earlier, the member's mother had also worked with the nurse to learn about and enroll in a state Medicaid program that waived copay costs and lower the burden of the health care expenses for her child. This was important because it helped the member receive necessary care and medications and mitigated the cost consideration in deciding which types of care to pursue. **Now, the Accordant nurse assisted even further by locating several additional resources for this member, including a local host program pairing hospital families with local homeowners for various levels of support, including a place to sleep during a hospital stay.** They also discussed other options for transportation that would alleviate the need for parking at the hospital.

The immediate period following discharge is critical to the overall wellness and smooth recovery of the member. The member's mother was concerned about the level of support available following discharge from the hospital. The nurse encouraged the mother to take the Accordant number with her when leaving for the hospital and also reminded her that a follow-up call to review discharge instructions would be proactively scheduled. The nurse also educated the member's mother on the available services that may help after discharge, such as physical therapy and in-home nurse care and reviewed the current treatment plan with the mother involved in each step in the process.

Important Opportunities to Increase Utilization and Reduce Health Care Costs

- **Use** of Medicaid benefits to improve cost effectiveness
- **Review** of discharge instructions after surgery to ensure understanding and compliance; reduces the chance for medical errors
- **Coordination** of needed resources for the member and the family
- **Education** on in-home services available that could proactively assist in speeding recovery times
- **Unique** one-to-one relationship with member's family, which encouraged faster follow-up to identify potential problems before they become acute issues

At times the mother was very worried, even tearful, about the prognosis for her child, the daunting task of facing recovery, and even the future. She even expressed concern about the coping skills of the younger sibling, who had been required to help with care from time to time. The nurse provided extensive education on coping tips, dealing with family dynamics, and the role of support for caregivers, too. Additional information on support groups was provided and the member's mother was able to locate support groups nearby that could offer assistance. The nurse was a constant source of education, reassurance, and support for the family, while being ready to collaborate with the member's health providers, health plan, or other vendors when needed.

After the hospital stay, the nurse called the member's mother to follow up. She said that the surgery had gone well. She had been able to apply for and receive Medicaid, which had eased a significant cost burden. The member's discharge care plan included orders for several additional types of in-home support that could ease the burden of care and help speed recovery and rehabilitation. **The member's mother was extremely grateful for the constant support from the Accordant nurse to assist with the burden of care, as well as the overall care costs. As a result of this prolonged, direct support, the member's mother felt empowered for the days ahead to provide the very best proactive care for the member, which would ultimately improve quality of life and help to minimize health care costs. The member's mother said that, "even in spite of all the bad things happening around [me,] I can still see the good in people because of you."**

1. The associations among economic hardship, caregiver psychological distress, disease activity, and health-related quality of life in children with juvenile idiopathic arthritis. *Qual Life Res.* 2012 Sep;21(7):1185-1191.
2. Brehaut J, Kohen D, Garner R, Miller A, Lach L, et al. Health Among Caregivers of Children With Health Problems: Findings From a Canada Population-Based Study. *Am J Public Health.* 2009;Jul;99(7):1254-1262.
3. Kuzuya M, Enoki H, Hasegawa J, Izawa S, Hirakawa I, et al. Impact of caregiver burden on adverse health outcomes in community-dwelling dependent care recipients. *Am J Geriatr Psychiatry.* 2011; Apr;19(4):382-391.

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