

Chronic Conditions: Public Perceptions about Health Care Access and Services

Chronic conditions are health concerns that are expected to last a year or more and limit what one can do *or* require ongoing medical care. Some people have serious chronic conditions which limit what they can do *and* require ongoing care. Severity is often related to the number of different conditions a person might have. Forty-five percent of Americans have one or more chronic conditions; ten percent have three or more.

Partnership for Solutions conducted two separate public opinion polls of people with chronic conditions. The first, conducted in 2000, included people with chronic conditions and family caregivers. The second, conducted in late 2001, polled just people with serious chronic conditions—those whose conditions required ongoing medical care *and* limited their normal activities. Below are the major findings from these surveys.

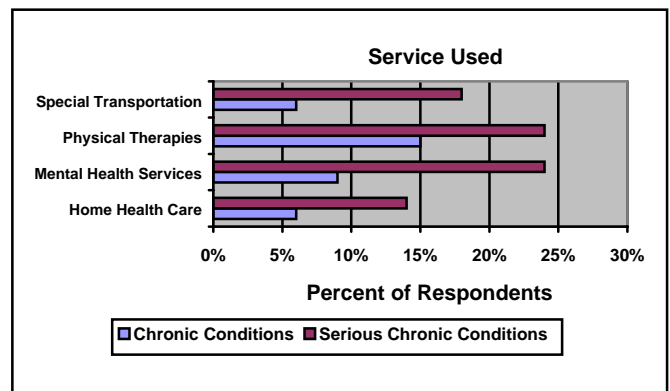
Health Status

In the first poll of people with any chronic condition, 15 percent reported their health status to be fair or poor. Among people with serious chronic conditions surveyed in the second poll, 65 percent reported being in fair or poor health.

Service Use

People with serious chronic conditions reported much higher service utilization in the year prior to the survey relative to the people surveyed who had any type of chronic condition. Twenty-three percent of people with chronic conditions saw four or more doctors compared to 31 percent of those with serious chronic conditions. And while 57 percent of people with chronic conditions had seen a medical specialist within the previous year, 80 percent of those with serious chronic conditions had seen a specialist. Figure 1 shows other key services that survey respondents had used over the previous year.

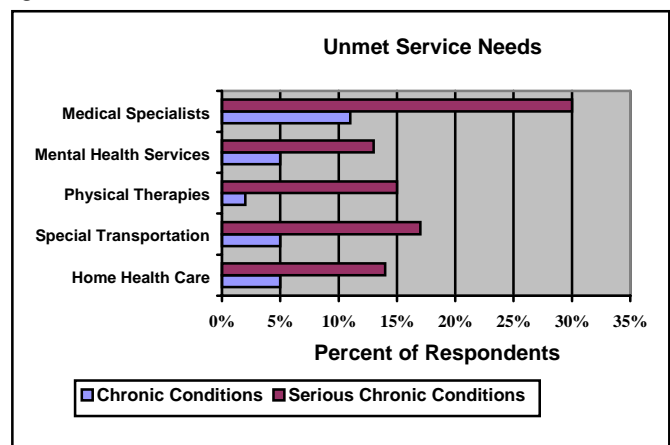
Figure 1



Unmet Service Needs

As figure 2 shows, the prevalence of unmet needs for key services among those with serious chronic conditions is often three times greater than it is for the general population of people with chronic conditions.

Figure 2

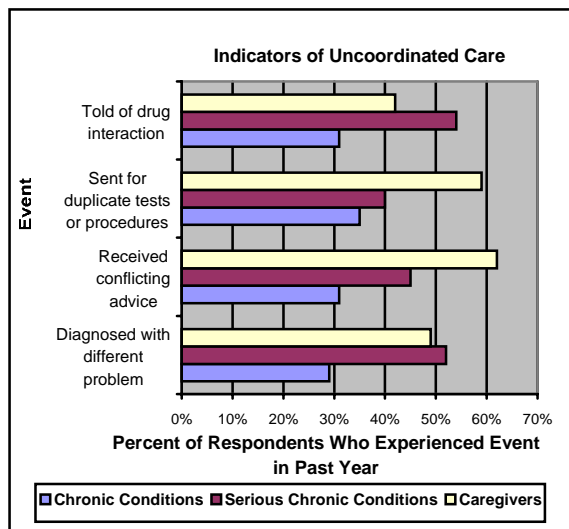


Care Coordination

Coordinating medical care and supportive services is a hallmark of quality care for people with serious chronic conditions. Among people with serious chronic conditions, only 24 percent responded that there was a doctor who coordinates their care compared to 79 percent of all people with chronic conditions. Among family caregivers (family or friends who provide unpaid personal assistance to people with chronic conditions), 45 percent expressed a preference to have someone other than themselves take the lead in fully coordinating care for those for whom they provide assistance.

However, for many people with chronic conditions, care is not well coordinated. And for people with serious conditions, confusing and potentially dangerous experiences with the medical care system are even more common.

Figure 3



Conclusion

Treatment of chronic conditions and medical practice oriented to those conditions is fast becoming a significant issue for the health care financing and service delivery systems. These surveys highlight a spectrum of concerns for people with chronic conditions that intensify for those who have serious chronic conditions, including those who are significantly impaired and must rely on family caregivers. While we

continue to seek ways to prevent the onset of chronic conditions, we should also consider how to prevent these conditions from becoming severe, and address the needs of millions who have multiple chronic conditions. Support of better chronic care, through improved coordination of care, could:

- Reduce unnecessary and potentially dangerous diagnostic duplication and treatment interactions;
- Improve the quality of life for people with chronic conditions—regardless of the severity of the condition;
- Delay decline in health or functional status so that fewer people experience serious chronic conditions; and
- Provide for more effective uses of existing resources.

Methodology

Fact sheet data were derived from two public opinion telephone surveys commissioned by the Partnership for Solutions. The first survey conducted in 2000 by Harris Interactive, Inc. interviewed 1,663 people, of whom 983 either had a chronic condition, cared for someone with a chronic condition, or both. The second survey, conducted by the Gallup Organization in late 2001 and early 2002, interviewed 1,200 people with serious chronic conditions.

About the Partnership

The Partnership for Solutions, led by Johns Hopkins University and The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, is an initiative to improve the care and quality of life for the more than 125 million Americans with chronic health conditions. The Partnership is engaged in three major activities: conducting original research and identifying existing research that clarifies the nature of the problem; communicating these research findings to policymakers, business leaders, health professionals, advocates, and others; and working to identify promising solutions to the problems faced by people with chronic health conditions. Our partner organizations include: Alzheimer's Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Diabetes Association, American Geriatrics Society, Family Voices, National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, and National Chronic Care Consortium.