

## **National Campaign Equips Seniors and Health Care Providers with Tools to Avoid Unnecessary Hospitalizations and Share Health Information**

By Sheila Conneen and Khara Davis

Annually, nearly three million elderly Medicare participants receive home health care to support them as they deal with complex, chronic illness; more than a quarter of these seniors will be hospitalized while they are receiving care at home. Although many of these hospitalizations are unavoidable, successful collaboration among home care patients, their families, home health agencies, physicians, and hospitals can significantly decrease unnecessary hospitalizations and help seniors stay where most of them want to be – at home. In the August 2007 issue of *Southwest Senior*, New Mexico's Medicare quality improvement organization (QIO), the New Mexico Medical Review Association (NMMRA), described the opening of the Home Health Quality Improvement (HHQI) National Campaign sponsored by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). This voluntary 12-month campaign has used an interdisciplinary approach aimed at uniting the home health community nationwide with a shared vision to reduce avoidable hospitalizations and to improve the quality of care and health outcomes for home health recipients. Nearly 98 percent of New Mexico's 66 Medicare-certified home health agencies and the New Mexico Association for Home and Hospice Care (NMAHHC) have been active partners with NMMRA in making this campaign a success.

NMMRA's home health team has taken the HHQI National Campaign on the road in an effort to assist New Mexico's participating campaign home health agencies achieve the campaign's goal, that of reducing the average acute care hospitalization rate across all agencies by a 5 percent relative improvement from baseline to the campaign's end. Since March of 2007, NMMRA has traveled over 5,000 miles throughout the state to deliver, distribute and educate home health agency staff about the campaign's best practice intervention packages. To date, the team has conducted learning sessions covering tools to help their patients remain safe and independent in their homes. Some of these tools address planning for emergencies, managing one's medications, immunizations, preventing falls, managing one's own health, and having effective interactive conversations with health care providers. Through regional learning sessions, newsletters, presentations at NMAHHC conferences, and on-site visits, NMMRA has worked closely with over 95 percent of New Mexico's home health agencies by conducting these learning sessions, with attendance ranging from four to 15 home health agency staff for each session. Learning sessions are hosted by various home health agencies in each of New Mexico's five regions throughout state. In addition to reviewing monthly best practice intervention packages (BPIPs), NMMRA's home health team provides assistance related to a participating agency's most recent outcome based quality improvement (OBQI)/outcome based quality monitoring (OBQM) and HHQI data reports. The team has also hosted monthly learning sessions at its office in Albuquerque.

Some of the tools developed for the campaign may be of interest and use for all of us whether we are seniors at risk for being hospitalized or simply adults who want to stay safe and be effective partners in our health care. It is often difficult for patients and health care providers to obtain and share the information that is needed to assure that we receive safe and appropriate care. Not having or sharing correct, relevant, and timely health care information is no longer seen by consumers and health care professionals as an inconvenience – it is recognized as a critical patient safety issue. To assure that we can keep track of the vital pieces of our health history, the campaign has designed a personal health record, which can help us bring together important information about our health such as our medications, immunizations, test results, and medical conditions. The personal health record can also help us get ready for doctors' appointments by preparing questions and concerns in advance. This pocket sized personal health record is available at <http://medqic.org>. Click on Home Health at the top, then HHQI located in a box on the right side of your screen. Scroll down and click on Transitional Care Coordination. In a box to the right, you will find numerous resources in .pdf format. Scroll down to Personal Health Record.pdf.

Even with our personal health record in hand, once we get to the doctor's office it is sometimes difficult to know what to ask and how to make the most of the time we have together with our health care providers. To make this dialogue more effective, the National Institutes of Health has developed a publication that guides an older person in choosing a doctor and improving communication with his/her doctor. <http://www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/TalkingWithYourDoctor/>. This booklet can assist us in planning for our doctors' appointments, knowing what information to report at the visit and how to ask the questions we need to have answered. While health care providers are vital players in identifying and managing our health care concerns, in the end, the most important players are ourselves.

For more information call Sheila Conneen, at (505) 998-9757 or via e-mail at [sconneen@nmmra.org](mailto:sconneen@nmmra.org) or Khara Davis, at (505) 998-9755 or via e-mail at [kdavis@nmmra.org](mailto:kdavis@nmmra.org).

*Sheila Conneen, PhD, RN-C, is NMMRA's home health quality improvement manager. She is a certified adult nurse practitioner and has worked in acute care, home health, and long-term care for over 30 years.*

*Khara Davis, BS, is NMMRA's home health quality improvement coordinator. She has worked in education and community-based and long-term care for over 10 years.*