

Patient Consumer Navigation Support

DRA Project Report 06-03

Ensuring that underserved patients have the support they need to navigate our complex healthcare system and access high quality, timely and appropriate services is important for reducing health disparities. Patient navigators, both electronic and personal, help patients and their families navigate the complex healthcare system. Navigation services include:

- Facilitating communication among patients, family, survivors and healthcare providers
- Coordinating care among providers
- Arranging financial support, transportation and child care and assisting with paperwork
- Ensuring that appropriate medical records are available at medical appointments
- Facilitating follow-up appointments
- Community outreach and building partnerships with local agencies and groups

Who are patient navigators?

There is no one common definition of patient navigators and the profile of a patient navigator varies widely by program. Many use trained community health workers who may be full-time employees or volunteers. Community health workers have close ties to the local community and serve as important links between underserved communities and the healthcare system. They also possess the linguistic and cultural skills needed to connect with patients from underserved communities. Healthcare navigators include trained social workers, nurses and nurse practitioners as well as trained lay persons/volunteers. Some navigation programs also use a team based approach that combines community health workers with one or more professionals with experience in healthcare or social work.

Studies of navigation programs show promising outcomes!

- Five year survival rates for breast cancer comparing a 22 year period ending in 1986 with a five year period from 1995 to 2000 showed a jump from 39% to 70%
- A study of low income women in New York found increased rates of cancer screening when women were contacted by phone with a trained navigator.

Next Steps:

The healthcare system needs to be streamlined to facilitate navigation for both patients and providers. Some possible steps in achieving this objective include:

- **Developing simple and clear documentation in health systems**
- **Developing common definitions for health navigators and related programs**
- **Develop a website as a resource for navigators containing best practices**
- **Research how to integrate information technology with navigators**
- **Develop a "health compass" to help individuals manage the healthcare system**
- **Identify and support ongoing sources of payment for consumer navigation**

Review the full report at: http://www.altfutures.com/dra/Enhanced_Consumer_Support.pdf. For more information on the DRA Project, visit our website at www.altfutures.com/dra.

"The challenge is not only to anticipate the future, but to create it."