

## Rx for readmissions

Sunday, March 20, 2011

The excellent report "Probe: Hospital readmissions take toll in Pennsylvania" (March 6 and TribLIVE.com) depicted enormous human and financial costs and highlighted the crucial truth that the best way to reduce health care's 40- to 50-percent waste is rapid, sustained quality improvement.

The successful readmission reduction project at UPMC St. Margaret described in the accompanying story "Educating patients a fix, but it lacks cash carrot" (March 6 and TribLIVE.com) was organized by the **Pittsburgh Regional Health Initiative (PRHI)** with critical underwriting from the R.K. Mellon Foundation. PRHI assembled an improvement team from the hospital and affiliated physician practices to identify causes of readmissions among patients with advanced lung disease. The team reduced readmissions by more than 40 percent through thorough patient education in use of inhalers, comprehensive review of patient medications before discharge, well-planned patient handoffs and coordination between hospital staff and personal physicians, and home visits by nurse care managers.

These interventions were designed by health-care professionals in facilitated "quality improvement" sessions. The key was more one-on-one contact between professionals and patients. They reflect what patients want and need. Ironically, many of these successful practices are not reimbursed.

The PRHI-sponsored project shows how to improve patient health and prevent the causes of frequent (expensive) hospitalizations. As the Trib coverage points out, spreading and sustaining higher-quality care requires a better payment system. Insurers and government too often pay for mistakes and deficiencies, but not for cost-effective preventive care to keep patients out of hospitals and emergency departments.

**Karen Feinstein**

*The writer is CEO and president of the Pittsburgh Regional Health Initiative (prhi.org).*

[http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/pittsburghtrib/opinion/s\\_728109.html#ixzz1HExStvJR](http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/pittsburghtrib/opinion/s_728109.html#ixzz1HExStvJR)