

SIG TRENDS

Seeing Healthcare Issues through Different Lenses

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Recently I had an interesting conversation over lunch with a care-management colleague about the delivery of healthcare in rural settings. The day before, our facility had called a large metropolitan-based insurance carrier to request additional days of inpatient care for one of our patients. Our telephone call was answered by voicemail, so the care manager left a message giving the specific reason we were requesting an extension.

A few hours later, the insurance carrier returned our call. “What do you mean—the patient lives ‘off grid’?” Our care manager explained that the patient did not have electricity or telephone service. “What do you mean—the patient doesn’t have electricity or a telephone?” Our care manager further explained that some people in rural areas don’t get electricity or telephone service because of the expense of acquiring those services or because they simply choose not to have those services. The insurance representative was quite perplexed, but eventually she approved the additional days.

As quality professionals, whether we work in urban settings or rural settings, we are reminded daily about the need to view issues through the lenses of a different paradigm. This requires us to step back and think about things from different perspectives. Putting ourselves in the place of others helps us improve healthcare quality. Having the ability to thoughtfully consider different mental approaches will allow us to work toward inclusiveness and improve access to care.

Undoubtedly, our healthcare system will change. It is hoped that with the nomination of Regina Benjamin as Surgeon General and the confirmation of Kathleen Sebelius as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the voices of our rural citizens will be heard. NAHQ’s Critical Access Hospital/Rural Healthcare Special Interest Group is one of the e-mail discussion forums available to NAHQ members. This member service can be accessed on the Members Only section of the NAHQ Web site (www.nahq.org).

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