

How Can We Design a Care Navigator Role That Helps Patients With SUD Initiate Treatment?

The Public Health Problem

Effective Substance Use Disorder (SUD) treatment is not reaching people with SUD, especially those of marginalized backgrounds. Despite evidence of effective SUD treatments, only about 8–14% of people with past-year SUD receive any treatment.

Background

Care navigation is a psychosocial intervention approach that seeks to facilitate timely patient access to appropriate care by identifying and intervening upon barriers to obtaining treatment.

Within the SUD context, this may involve supportive follow-up calls and text messages, treatment center coordination assistance, and linkage to resources for basic needs (e.g., transportation assistance) while helping patients maintain motivation for treatment seeking.

What This Article Addresses

This protocol paper outlines the design of a SUD care navigation intervention within a virtual triage center of a large integrated healthcare system and methods for evaluating its clinical effectiveness and implementation in routine care.

What They're Doing *(Methods)*

The Addressing Barriers to Care for Substance Use Disorder (ABC-SUD) study, a hybrid type I cluster-randomized effectiveness-implementation trial, will test whether a care navigation intervention can improve patient engagement in SUD treatment.

What They Aim to Learn



Effectiveness of Care Navigation: Whether adding a structured care navigator role to the health care system increases patient engagement in SUD treatment.



Implementation Feasibility and Fidelity: How well the care navigation intervention can be delivered as intended and successfully address patient barriers.



Impact on Health Equity and Access: Whether care navigation improves access and engagement across subgroups of patients with SUD.

Opportunities for Action

Health care leaders and providers

This study has the potential to transform how health care systems deliver patient-centered support for linking patients to appropriate treatment for SUD and other chronic conditions.

Policymakers and payors

The use of standard implementation measures to rigorously evaluate organizational leadership and climate will inform the development of scalable models that can be tailored to different health care systems and settings.

Patients and Families

The care navigation intervention may help patients address social, motivational, and logistical barriers to initiating SUD treatment