Homeless Elderly Health Disparities

Being homeless affects all different kinds of people. It is usually a snowball effect in which there is an illness or vast expense that leads to missed rent or missed house payments resulting in the loss of the home. The elderly population is at a greater risk of homelessness due to their increase medical expenses. Without adequate medical insurance, medical expenses can become an overwhelming burden.

There are certain population groups that are also more at risk for homelessness. These groups include people with mental illness, substance abuse, and people that lack social support. If you add these risk factors on to being at an increased age, incidence of homelessness increases (Plumb, 2000, July 25).

When a person is homeless, they have a decreased access to health care. Without a formal address to be contacted, follow-up care is difficult. Most homeless do not have adequate insurance or primary care providers, resulting in most of their health care needs being met at emergency departments (Plumb, 2000, July 25). Transportation to and from appointments is also a heavy burden on the homeless population (McCary & O’Donnell, 2012). This population also faces internal barriers in which they struggle with the choice of finding food and shelter or meeting their health care needs (Plumb, 2000, July 25).

Some common health care problems that are expedited in homeless, particularly in the elderly, are hypertension and diabetes. Tuberculosis is also seen due to crowded living situations in homeless shelters (Plumb, 2000, July 25). Hypertension and hyperlipidemia are often asymptomatic leading to mismanagement. The proper storage of medications is also a barrier for adequate health management. Mortality rates for the homeless in the United States and Canada can be more than three to five times higher than the average person, with heart disease being the leading cause of death in 45 to 64 year olds (McCary & O’Donnell, 2012).

Resources

McCary, J.M. & O’Donnell, J.J. (2012). Health, housing, and the heart: Cardiovascular disparities in homeless people. Retrieved from http://circ.ahajournals.org/content/111/20/2555.full

Plumb, J.D. (2000, July 25). Homelessness: Reducing health disparities. Retrieved from http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC80208/