The Quality Management System in U.S. Home-Health Agencies
- Literature Review -

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Introduction:
For revision of the Long-Term Care Insurance System of April 2006, it was indicated that "ensuring and improving the quality of long-term care" is one of the most important issues in Japan. For the purpose of determining methods for enhancing the quality of care in long-term care settings in Japan, this presentation discusses quality improvement efforts in U.S. home-health agencies.

Methods:
Literature review of quality improvement strategies in U.S. home health agencies.

Results and Discussion:
It was revealed that in virtually every sector of the home health care system, the U.S. government has launched several programs to improve the quality of home health care. These programs include, (1) outcomes assessment information set, an assessment tool, (2) quality measures, which measure the quality of certain aspects of home health care, (3) Home Health Compare, which provides information regarding the quality of care in home health agencies, (4) administrative inspections and surveys, and (5) individual care review systems, in addition to (6) granting accrediting organizations (i.e., the Joint Commission Accreditation Home Care) authority to conduct administrative inspections and surveys and deem accredited health care agencies as meeting the Medicare and Medicaid certification requirements. Although these programs were implemented separately, they are organically linked, forming a synthetic, continuous and complementary management system. It has been reported that since the management system has been organized, the quality of care provided by home health agencies has significantly improved.

Conclusions:
The results suggest that although many quality improvement efforts such as the information disclosure system and monitoring and evaluation of the quality of long-term care by various accreditation organizations have been implemented in Japan, they are discrete and unconnected, and there is much room for improvements. For ensuring and improving the quality of care in Japan, it is important to (1) establish a synthetic, continuous, complementary system, (2) use data from routinely collected comprehensive assessments such as a long-term care requirement certification program, develop qualitative and objective quality measures that determine which clients have potential quality problems and be able to conduct multi-institutional comparisons, and (3) develop a method for evaluating the outcomes.

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