

The Disease Management Approach

Many times patients are faced with a series of fragmented components of care--separate diagnoses from different specialists, treatment with sometimes conflicting drugs prescribed by various physicians, hospitalization, rehabilitation therapists, psychological counseling and follow-up observation. Disease management connects these disparate elements, coordinating the pieces for a more cost-effective, patient-centered approach to care.

Disease management is a holistic approach that maps out planned care over the life cycle of the disease. It also focuses on the prevention and early diagnosis of disease as well as constant monitoring of information from patients, doctors, hospitals, clinics and pharmacies.

"Disease management is a journey, an evolution," said Richard Smith, CEE general manager with Eli Lilly in Geneva, Switzerland during the diabetes workshop. "The beauty of disease management is that solutions are being derived together as a team. Disease management, like politics, is always local."

Disease management is used to treat such diseases and conditions as cancer, asthma, depression, ulcers and hypertension.

Using disease management, care for patients with diabetes, for example, includes not only a series of regular doctor's visits and treatment with pharmaceuticals, but also dietary and fitness education, self blood-glucose monitoring skills and psychological support. Doctors work with patients, nutritionists, nurses, psychologists and diabetes educators to assure that patients are receiving comprehensive care.

Because disease management focuses on patient participation, the process can be adapted to local practices and cultures, Smith said. As patients become more invested in their own health care and as expensive procedures and specialists are coordinated to avoid duplication and conflicts, the cost of care goes down, he said.

"Is it sustainable? Time will tell, but I'd bet on it," Smith predicted.

(Kathryn Dickey, manager of international government relations for Eli Lilly, contributed to this report.)