

Spinal Cord Injury & Disorder

Spinal Cord Injury QUERI

April 2012

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The Spinal Cord Injury Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (SCI-QUERI) strives to implement evidence-based methods for enhancing Veteran self-management and disease prevention in the context of interdisciplinary care. SCI-QUERI works closely with VA's Office of Spinal Cord Injury and Disorders (SCI/D) Services to identify critical, time-sensitive issues that can be addressed as part of this broader mission. Currently SCI-QUERI is working to:

- Improve pressure ulcer prevention and management;
- Increase use of guidelines for infection control including MRSA (Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus) prevention and transmission in the SCI/D population, and increasing influenza vaccination rates in SCI healthcare workers;
- Understand current practices regarding weight management for Veterans with SCI/D; and
- Increase the use of new models of care delivery including telehealth and VA's personal health record system (My HealthVet) in the SCI/D population.

Pressure Ulcer

Factors such as lack of sensation and immobility increase the risk of pressure ulcer (PrU) development in persons with SCI/D, making PrUs a serious, costly, and life-long complication. The overall objective of SCI-QUERI's activities in this area is to develop evidence-based parameters for PrU prevention and healing. Specifically, SCI-QUERI is implementing a standardized SCI/D-specific assessment tool to assess pressure ulcer healing. The Pressure Ulcer Management Tool (PUMT), developed by colleagues at the Tampa VA, is being implemented across VA SCI centers. Using a collaborative approach, investigators are monitoring implementation through monthly calls with sites. Planned research will examine the impact of

using a standardized assessment tool on pressure ulcer treatment and healing rates. A second project is focused on using the SCI annual examination as an opportunity to promote skin health and prevention of skin breakdown in Veterans with spinal cord injury and disorder.

Obesity

Weight management is a significant problem in Veterans with SCI/D, with estimates that approximately two-thirds are overweight or obese. The long-term goal is to decrease the number of Veterans with SCI/D who are overweight or obese. SCI-QUERI has partnered with the Office of SCI/D Services and VA's National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention to begin to

address the problem. SCI-QUERI is assessing current practices related to weight management for Veterans with SCI/D, and is examining the barriers and facilitators in using VA's MOVE! program and other weight management efforts for Veterans with SCI/D. This information will provide the basis for modifying existing programs such as MOVE!, in ways that address the unique issues related to weight management in the SCI/D population.

Infection Control

Veterans with SCI/D are at high risk for infection due to:

- More frequent and longer hospitalizations;
- Body system-level impairments, such as neurogenic bladder and bowel; and
- Use of devices such as catheters.

MRSA is a frequent cause of infection and is associated with increased morbidity, mortality, and healthcare costs. Veterans with SCI/D are at increased risk for MRSA, with colonization or infection rates ranging from 8% to 30%. SCI-QUERI's long-term goal is to reduce the number of hospital-acquired MRSA infections and transmission of MRSA in SCI Centers. In collaboration with the Office of SCI/D Services and VA's MRSA Prevention Program, a toolkit on educating Veterans with SCI/D about MRSA has been developed and disseminated to the SCI Centers. Current implementation of the MRSA Prevention Program in SCI Centers also has been assessed, and an implementation project is being planned to improve adherence to contact precautions. SCI-QUERI is

Continued

now moving its efforts toward improving infection control strategies among providers who care for Veterans with SCI/D. This includes increased use of precautions for isolation and transmission. Other plans include a project to increase the currently low influenza vaccination rate of 48% in healthcare workers who work with Veterans with SCI/D.

Partnering to Improve Access

Access to care is often a problem for Veterans with SCI/D due to mobility impairments and the need for specialized equipment. SCI-QUERI worked with the Office of SCI/D

Services, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the Veterans Consumer Health Office to create an SCI/D Healthy Living Center for MyHealtheVet (MHV), VA's Internet-based personal health record. The SCI/D Healthy Living Center contains educational materials, consumer guides, and other evidence-based tools. SCI-QUERI also developed a promotional campaign to increase enrollment in MHV by Veterans with SCI/D. Further, SCI-QUERI is working with the Office of SCI/D Services to evaluate how best to use telehealth care in the SCI/D population.

How Do I Learn More?

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Web Resources

For more information about the QUERI program in general, and to link to all of the individual QUERI Centers, please go to

www.queri.research.va.gov

The SCI-QUERI Executive Committee

Each QUERI Executive Committee is co-chaired by a research expert and a clinician. The research expert and Director for SCI-QUERI is **Frances M. Weaver, Ph.D.** Clinical Co-Coordinators are **Barry Goldstein, M.D., Ph.D.** and **Margaret Hammond, M.D.** The Executive Committee includes other experts, representatives of service organizations, and consumers in the field of spinal cord injury: Leigh Anderson, M.D.; Barbara Bates-Jensen, Ph.D.; Stephen Burns, MD; John Carswell; Fred Cowell (Paralyzed Veterans of America); Chester Ho, MD; Gail Powell-Cope, Ph.D.; Sunil Sabharwal, M.D.; Arthur M. Sherwood, PE, PhD (National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research); and Carol VanDeusen Lukas, EdD.