Creating the Malnutrition Resource Hub

Understanding the Need for Community-Based Services

The National Council on Aging disseminated to their networks a survey requesting feedback and insights related to individuals’ experience offering community services to malnourished older adults. The responses were overwhelming – as of mid-June 2016, nearly 370 people had completed the survey. The response rate itself underscored the need and desire to address malnutrition among older adults in a community-setting.

Background

The vast majority of survey participants worked for organizations and/or agencies that provided congregate meals, home-delivered meals, nutrition services such as oral nutrition supplements, falls prevention programs, benefits and/or insurance counseling (including SNAP), caregiver support and transportation. The size of organizations ranged from serving fewer than 500 individuals to over 10,000 in the past year alone.

Interestingly, those taking advantage of community services were largely split between urban, suburban and rural settings.

Reaching the Community

The survey inquired about how patients get referred to community-based organizations. The most popular responses included: family members/caregivers; self-referrals; community-based health care and allied health professionals, and community service providers. In addition, hospital-based health care workers and allied health professionals, as well as non-health professionals, were common responses. For those not getting hospital-based referrals, 47 percent indicated their organization would like to receive them (compared to 4 percent who said they would not; nearly 50 percent indicated N/A).

The majority of respondents are promoting their organizations services to hospitals, and are primarily doing so through community events, meetings with hospital employees and to a lesser extent, social media, professional conferences, web-based announcements and information, and newspaper/magazine ads.

Offering Services

Nearly 70 percent answered that their organization offers services and/or resources that help address malnutrition. The range of how they do so is vast, ranging from providing liquid nutritional supplements in home delivered meals, to healthy eating programs and cooking demos, and a daily lunch program.

If malnutrition services are not offered, survey respondents noted resources as the primary need. This may include personnel, funding and local resources.
Providing Information

Survey participants would like to offer a range of resources and tools to individuals utilizing their programs. The most prevalent responses included: overview of malnutrition among older adults; nutrition coverage information (e.g., Medicare/Medicaid); malnutrition screening tools; best practice guidelines; healthy eating resources; list of community services offered to help treat malnutrition among older adults; examples of other community-based programs, malnutrition treatment resources and data underscoring the financial benefits of addressing malnutrition in a community setting.

Individuals overwhelmingly want fact sheets and general education materials, and to a lesser extent links and background about other successful malnutrition-focused programs, videos, quizzes/interactive activities and case studies.