Course Learning Outcomes for Unit IV

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

2. Defend an opinion on critical issues facing the U.S. healthcare system in the 21st century.
   2.1 Identify critical issues facing the U.S. healthcare system.

Reading Assignment

Chapter 8:
Older People and Issues of Access to Long-Term Care, pp. 141-155

Chapter 9:
Assisted Living and Ethics, pp. 159-169

Unit Lesson

A vast number of U.S. citizens are considered elderly and have a variety of healthcare needs. As a result, there has been an increase in demand for long-term care services. It is expected that the number of elderly individuals diagnosed with chronic disease will increase significantly over the next several years. The increased need for long-term care services will continue to cripple our healthcare delivery system. The increased utilization of long-term care services has had a negative impact on government spending as well as families whose loved ones require such services.

Some continued concerns regarding long-term care services include the following issues:

- poor quality,
- shortage of long-term care workers,
- stringent eligibility requirements, and
- social and demographic changes.

Family members often provide long-term care services for their elders. However, changes in the social environment may disrupt such services and increase the need for services to be provided in a long-term care setting.

Some changes in the social environment include the following issues:

- rising divorce rates,
- increasing childlessness, and
- declining family sizes.

Long-term care services began to emerge in the 1980s as a result of advancements in medicine. Medical advancements made it possible for people to live longer with chronic diseases. By the year 2030, individuals age 65 and older will account for 20% (71 million people) of the population. It is also believed that long-term care services emerged due to a growing number of adult children with elderly parents who were disabled (Morrison & Furlong, 2014). In many cases, the adult children were not only providing long-term care services for their parents, but they were offering emotional and financial support as well.

The number of adult caregivers continues to climb, thus putting a strain on the U.S. economy. Many caregivers find themselves leaving the workforce early. According to Morrison and Furlong (2014), caregivers currently account for $3 trillion in lost wages and other benefits. Despite governmental efforts to improve long-
term care support services, funding is problematic and has created access issues. Access issues have been attributed to a lack of government resources and are expected to get worse due to the rising cost of services (Morrison & Furlong, 2014).

The current long-term care system is believed to be suboptimal due to the following issues:

- insufficient services,
- poor quality,
- system fragmentation, and
- service provider training and education.

Insurance companies play a major role with regard to long-term care services. However, private long-term care insurance can be rather expensive for the average American (Morrison & Furlong, 2014). In addition, the private long-term care benefits often have limits that prevent patients from receiving necessary services. Individuals who cannot pay for services may receive insurance in the form of Medicaid. Medicaid is a government insurance program that receives federal and state funding and covers individuals who are below a specified income threshold.

Assisted living is a component of long-term care. Assisted living provides care for adults who need assistance with activities of daily living. Activities of daily living include assistance with bathing, dressing, taking medications, and cooking meals. Assisted living emerged in the 1980s and was designed to accommodate elderly individuals who did not need 24-hour nursing services but wanted medical assistance provided in a home-like setting. Assisted living has been a preferred care alternative for some elderly individuals because of the privacy and independent living that is afforded to patients (Morrison & Furlong, 2014).

Individuals who choose assisted living care are often faced with difficult decisions such as leaving their homes and some of their possessions. However, individuals have an ability to adapt better when they are a part of the decision-making (Morrison & Furlong, 2014).

Despite the growing popularity of assisted living facilities, accessibility has been a major issue and has perpetuated ethical concerns regarding justice and fairness (Morrison & Furlong, 2014). Societal issues have played a role in individuals’ ability to access assisted living.

According to Morrison and Furlong (2014), the following issues have limited individuals’ access to assisted living facilities:

1. race and ethnicity;
2. income;
3. gender;
4. obesity; and
5. languages.

Although assisted living is relatively cheaper than nursing homes, they are still expensive and not affordable for many people. The majority of individuals living in an assisted living setting pay privately. Only 12% of the assisted living residents’ services are covered by Medicaid (Morrison & Furlong, 2014). Some assisted living facilities do not accept Medicaid reimbursement, which makes it almost impossible for individuals living below the poverty threshold to access assisted living services. In addition, the ethical principles of beneficence and nonmaleficence are disrupted when there are an inadequate number of staff available to provide necessary care.

Reference

Learning Activities (Non-Graded)

Research two or three assisted living facilities in your area, and compare the services they provide. Feel free to discuss your findings with your classmates in the Student Breakroom forum.

Non-graded Learning Activities are provided to aid students in their course of study. You do not have to submit them. If you have questions, contact your instructor for further guidance and information.