The cost of improving dialysis care

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Improving survival among dialysis patients may increase treatment costs significantly, according to a paper being presented at the American Society of Nephrology's 42nd Annual Meeting and Scientific Exposition in San Diego, CA. The authors created models of a 100 patient dialysis treatment center and a program with 7,500 hemodialysis patients (the approximate number of such patients in the Province of Ontario, Canada). Improving patient survival increased costs in the 100 patient model by $5 million over 10 years, and in the 7,500 patient model by $400 million over 10 years.

"Improving dialysis care may result in significantly increased costs for dialysis payers," said Philip McFarlane, MD (University of Toronto, Canada), one of the study authors. Increased long-term treatment costs may trigger a reduction or elimination of insurance reimbursement for dialysis patients. According to the paper, insurance companies and other agencies that pay for health care may reject new treatments that improve survival on dialysis, not because of cost of the new treatment, but because of the additional costs of providing dialysis.

"We hope that these results will help researchers and providers approach the controversial and sensitive question of cost effectiveness and life sustaining treatments," Dr. McFarlane noted. The findings indicate that research into less costly treatments that replace kidney function as well as improved patient survival may help dialysis patients and the organizations that underwrite the cost of dialysis care.

Source: American Society of Nephrology (news : web)

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