

Treatment and Outcomes Among Rural and Urban Nursing Home Residents with Depression

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Untreated depression can lower life expectancy and increase levels of functional and cognitive impairment. Among nursing facility residents, depression is a widely recognized problem that has been shown to increase use of facility resources. Nonetheless, the mental health needs of nursing homes are widely reported to be unmet, and the types of services available to nursing home residents are known to vary by location and type of facility. Specifically, nursing facility residents in metropolitan areas are more likely to have access to mental health specialists than are residents in non-metropolitan areas.

To better understand if limitations in access to mental health specialists affect rural nursing facility residents with depression, this study examines differences in the diagnosis, treatment and health outcomes of both rural and urban nursing home residents with depression.

Multivariate analyses controlling for resident and facility characteristics suggest that rural residents of facilities where staff have formal training on depression are more likely to receive effective treatment when compared with urban residents or rural residents in facilities without trained staff. Rural residents were also found to be at significantly greater risk than urban residents for loss of physical function. Urban residents and residents of facilities with formal agreements for mental health specialist support were more likely to have improved cognitive function at the end of one year as compared with rural residents and those in facilities without employment or contractual agreements with mental health specialists. Residents receiving effective treatment were also significantly more likely to have improved cognitive function and less likely to lose physical function, regardless of urban-rural residence.

Policy implications of targeted training for rural nursing facility staff and mental health specialist support to nursing facility residents are discussed.