

Evaluation Report:
Program to Encourage Active and Rewarding Lives for Seniors
(PEARLS)
Executive Summary

Background

This 2010 project supported the work of senior-serving agencies in Monroe County to better identify and treat depression among older adults. Project partners integrated depression screening into their standard intake assessment using the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9)—a tool well-validated in the research literature. Senior clients were screened and those falling into the minor depression range were eligible for the PEARLS intervention, and those identified with major depression received the more robust PEARLS+.

Program Summary

PEARLS is an 8-session home intervention. Program staff use problem-solving therapy, senior activation and mental health consultation to reduce depression. For clients with major depression, PEARLS+ includes collaboration with the primary care provider to provide a comprehensive assessment and access to medication as indicated.

Key Results

- Fewer clients were screened than originally targeted. The original goal of screening all clients was reduced to 1,300 per year. Over 3 years, a total of 2,422 seniors were screened for depression.
- 282 clients were eligible and referred to PEARLS and 263 clients to PEARLS+. 122 clients—less than a quarter of those eligible—actually enrolled in the intervention.
- Major depression among clients was much higher than anticipated; in the final year of the program, the teams no longer differentiated clients based on PHQ-9 scores and all clients received the higher level of care, PEARLS+.
- The length of stay in the program varied greatly, from a little less than a month to just over a year. 52% of the clients across three years completed all 8 home visit sessions.
- Clients reported a high level of satisfaction with the program and project partners felt that there was significant collaboration across agencies.

Fewer clients were screened than targeted and less than a quarter of those eligible enrolled	Clients that did complete the program did well. PHQ-9 scores declined substantially between baseline and final session assessment, from an average of 14.5 to 8.6	More than half (57%) of the clients lowered their PHQ-9 score by at least 50%
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Challenges and Learnings

- The low enrollment encountered by this project was consistent with PEARLS programs nationally. Staff have gained clarity on what type of client is best suited for the program, so targeting in the future will be more strategic.
- Client retention was a struggle in the final year. Staff acknowledged that this program is not a good fit for every depressed senior.
- Project staff concluded that it is unrealistic for all clients to complete the program in 19 weeks. Life issues such as sickness, hospitalizations, and family emergencies often prevent them from staying on course for program completion.
- Depression screening is now part of care managers' daily work