

The Need to Develop and Implement Transitional Care Guidelines for Adolescents with Special Needs in Iran

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Dear Editor

Children with long-term health conditions face unique challenges and potential secondary issues that differ significantly from those of adults with chronic diseases.¹ One of the significant challenges for these children and adolescents is the transition to adult-oriented care. Transition of Care (ToC) is a “purposeful, planned process that addresses the healthcare transitions for young adults with special healthcare needs.” The goal of healthcare transitions for these individuals is to maximize functioning and lifelong potential through effective service delivery.²

Young people with complex healthcare requirements frequently need ongoing monitoring and medical attention to maintain optimal health into adulthood. In Iran, the complexity, care demands, and the number of children with complex healthcare needs are increasing.³ As chronic illnesses now exhibit longer survival rates, new long-term consequences and disabilities necessitate careful monitoring. For example, while the incidence of iron overload-associated cardiomyopathy has declined among patients with transfusion-dependent thalassemia (TDT), these patients, due to their extended survival times and associated poor glucose metabolism, are now more susceptible to atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease.⁴ Similarly, cystic fibrosis-related diabetes is a comorbidity that increases with age, potentially affecting up to 50% of adults with cystic fibrosis. Furthermore, survivors of childhood cancer face an elevated risk of significant cardiovascular disease in the future. Adult caregivers must be aware of these evolving health issues as these children grow and know how to manage them effectively.⁵

Developed nations like the United States, Canada, and Europe have devised and implemented transition programs. Research from these regions has explored the factors facilitating a smooth transition, the process itself, and various transition strategies.⁶ Studies on health-related outcomes are essential to establish best practices and develop guidelines for successful care transitions for adolescents with special healthcare needs.^{1, 7}

In Iran, however, studies on transition programs for children with chronic diseases are limited. A survey by Nikbakht Nasrabadi emphasized the need to design guidelines for the proper transition of patients with special needs from infancy to adulthood in pediatric and adult health care teams. Iran’s pediatric and adult healthcare teams must create transitional care plans that are sensitive to the needs of young adults and developmentally appropriate.⁸ Early adolescence should be used to start preparing the adolescent and their parents for the move to adult care. Building trust with new healthcare professionals, encouraging continuous communication, and bridging the gap between pediatric and adult care teams are all goals of a planned, organized approach to transitional care. High patient adherence and satisfaction ratings have been attained by using a combined pediatric and adult care transition paradigm for a variety of medical illnesses.⁹ To conclude, research on health-related outcomes in Iran urgently needs to identify best practices and develop guidelines for

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successful care transitions for adolescents with special healthcare needs. By addressing these challenges and implementing structured transition programs, we can ensure better health outcomes and improved quality of life for these young individuals.

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Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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