

Discharge Planning in Mental Healthcare Settings: A Concept Analysis

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BACKGROUND

- The deinstitutionalization of mental healthcare has resulted in a shift of services from hospital to community settings.
- Transitions to community healthcare services, and fragmentation and inaccessibility of these services, continue to pose challenges for people with mental illness.
- Greater attention has been given to the role of discharge planning as a means of addressing these challenges.
- Despite the growing body of mental health literature examining interventions during the discharge planning process, the quality and impact of these processes on patient outcomes remains poorly understood.
- Our ability to evaluate discharge planning and compare disparate processes has been hampered by persistent conceptual confusion.

PURPOSE

To facilitate evaluation of discharge planning processes in mental healthcare settings, we completed a concept analysis to systematically explore the meaning of “discharge planning” in the mental health literature. This concept analysis is part of a larger study to develop and test an instrument to measure discharge planning processes in mental healthcare.

METHODS

Walker and Avant’s (2011) 8-step concept analysis approach was adopted as a systematic and transparent process to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of discharge planning in mental healthcare.

Electronic databases and grey literature were searched and analyzed according to Grant and Booth’s (2009) systematic search and review process. Literature published between 1800 and 2016 were reviewed. Fifty-five articles were included in the analysis.

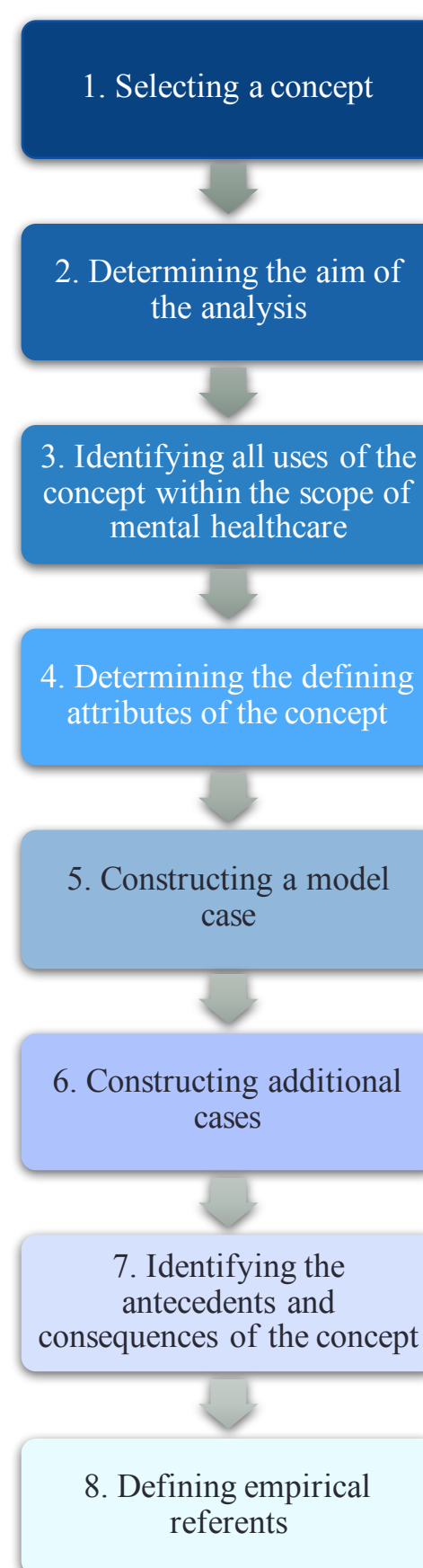
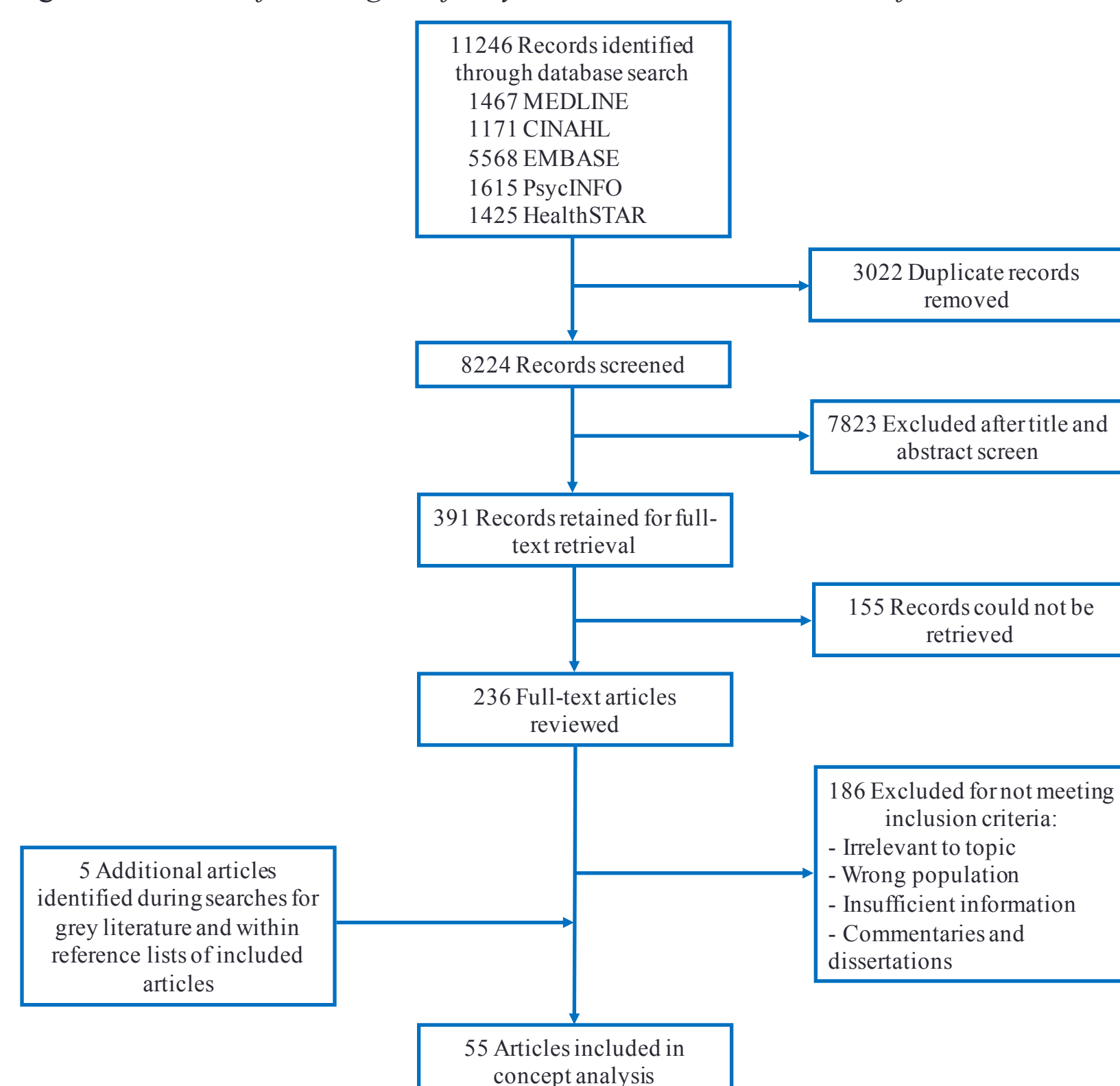


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram for systematic search and review of the literature.



RESULTS

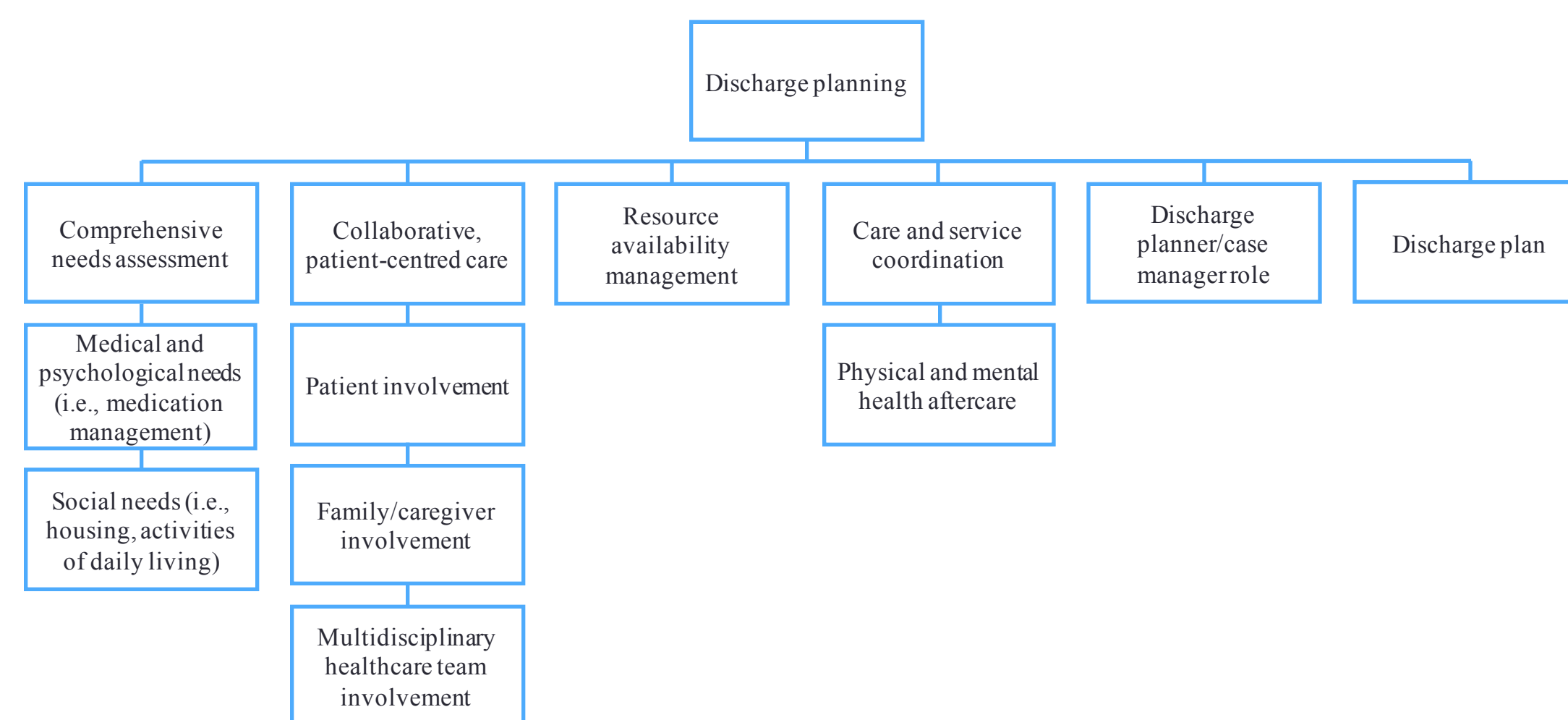
- The first two concept analysis steps involved selecting the concept of discharge planning in mental healthcare, and determining that the overall aim of the analysis was to provide a conceptual definition of discharge planning to facilitate evaluation and measurement.
- The remaining steps were completed through the systematic search and review of the literature.

Definitions

- Discharge planning is broadly defined as an approach to facilitate patients’ transition from inpatient to outpatient healthcare settings, and as a solution to reduce adverse outcomes, such as hospital readmissions.

Defining attributes

- Defining attributes are recurring key characteristics unique to the concept of interest and differentiates it from other similar or related concepts.
- Discharge planning was found to encompass several distinguishing criteria:



Sample cases

- Cases further clarify and illustrate the concept.
- A **model case** demonstrates all of the defining attributes of the concept and are used to provide clarity to the concept’s meaning and context (Figure 2).
- **Contrary cases** reflect an absence of the concept of interest (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Model case of discharge planning.

Oliver is an 18-year-old male who was admitted to the emergency department at the local hospital on a 72-hour hold for psychiatric evaluation due to symptoms of psychosis, auditory hallucinations, and suicidal ideation. After his initial assessment in the emergency department, Oliver was diagnosed with first-episode psychosis and early onset schizophrenia, and transferred to the psychiatric inpatient unit.

On the inpatient psychiatry and mental health unit, the multidisciplinary mental health team conducted a comprehensive needs assessment of Oliver in preparation for his discharge from the hospital. Oliver’s inpatient nurse was designated as his discharge planner, who worked closely with the medical team and social worker to determine Oliver’s needs and to coordinate aftercare services. As part of the treatment and discharge planning processes, a meeting was held with Oliver, his mother, and the inpatient mental healthcare team. Oliver’s discharge planner facilitated the meeting and presented the proposed discharge plan. Feedback were elicited from Oliver, his parents, and the healthcare team.

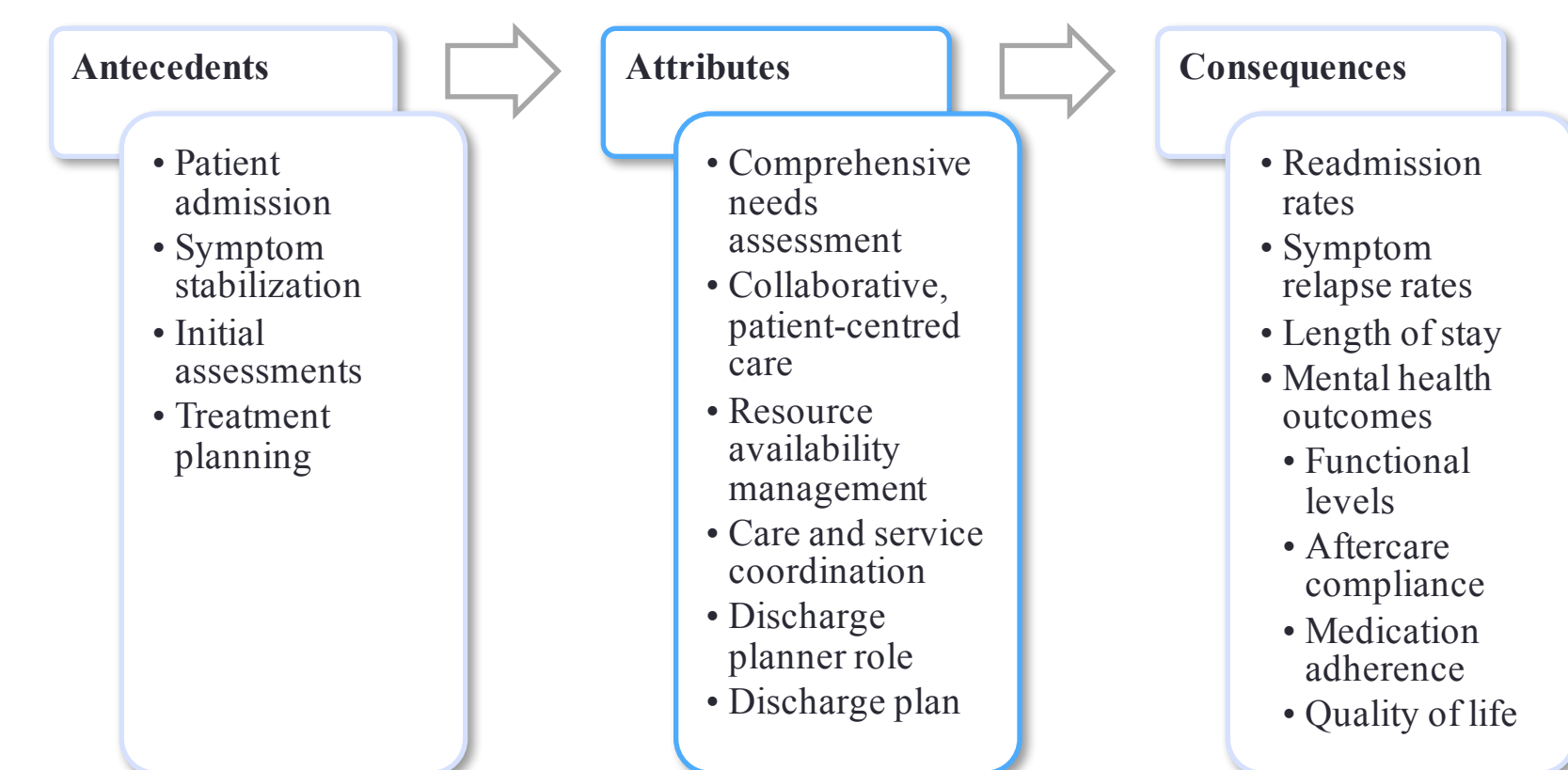
After this meeting, a revised discharge plan was developed and communicated to Oliver and his parents. Information within the plan included Oliver’s discharge date, scheduled follow-up appointments with his psychiatrist and family physician, a list of his medications, and signs and symptoms of relapse. The discharge planner also provided additional teaching to Oliver and his mother regarding Oliver’s condition, medication side effects, as well as nutrition and lifestyle modifications. Acknowledging that Oliver’s mother recently lost her job, the discharge planner also worked with the social worker to apply for financial entitlements and support from the government, as well as employment insurance from her workplace. Additional community resources and support group information was also provided.

Figure 3. Contrary case of discharge planning.

Jack is a 53-year-old male who was brought to the emergency department by the police after he was found walking around in traffic in a busy intersection. His appearance was disheveled and he was wearing a t-shirt, shorts, and socks in -20°C weather. Jack was well-known to the emergency department; he was single, homeless, and had a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia. He had been treated with Risperidone for years, and lived at a nearby shelter. After stabilizing his symptoms in the emergency department and offered a hot meal and some clothes from the lost and found department, the nurse left a message with Jack’s case manager regarding his admission. He was discharged the next morning and was advised to return to the shelter and follow-up with his case manager.

Antecedents and consequences

- Antecedents and consequences assist the concept analysis process by considering the social contexts in which the concept is used.
- **Antecedents** are events or situations that ensue before the occurrence of the concept of interest; **consequences** are the outcomes or events as a result of the concept.



Empirical referents

- Empirical referents are “classes or categories of actual phenomena that by their existence or presence demonstrate the occurrence of the concept itself.”
- In instrument development, empirical referents are precisely linked to the theoretical framework of the concept and inform the instrument’s content and construct validity.
- Empirical referents to measure or indicate the occurrence of discharge planning:

| Defining attribute | Empirical referents |
|--|--|
| Comprehensive needs assessment | • Assess patient medical, psychological and social functioning using a systematic approach and validated tool(s) (e.g., previous and current physical and mental status, knowledge regarding their medications, housing circumstances, and ability to perform activities of daily living) |
| Collaborative, patient-centred care | • Conduct meetings with the patient, his/her family, and all relevant healthcare providers to plan for patient post-discharge needs • Provide discharge date to patient and family/caregivers in a timely manner (i.e., at least 48 hours before discharge) |
| Resource availability management | • Identify available resources based on patients’ healthcare and social needs, including potential housing options and financial resources and entitlements |
| Care and service coordination | • Coordinate appropriate post-hospital care, referrals, and services, with a focus on ensuring continuity of physical and mental healthcare • Contact and cooperate closely with primary healthcare providers and/or relevant outpatient and community mental health services and agencies; provide discharge documents and information well before patient discharge |
| Discharge planner/case manager role | • Designate discharge planner or case manager to lead and oversee patient discharge planning progress towards discharge |
| Discharge plan | • Document a tentative discharge plan at the time of discharge planning, which often begins at admission; a copy of the final discharge plan should be provided to all members involved in discharge planning |

CONCLUSIONS

- This conceptual definition of discharge planning in mental healthcare can assist healthcare providers, organizational leaders, and policymakers to design and implement more effective health policies or evidence-based guidelines related to discharge planning.
- Conceptual clarity also provides a critical foundation for the development of a measurement instrument.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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