Effective Treatment of Patients with Medically Unexplained Symptoms Reduces Utilization and Improves Patient and Provider Satisfaction

They suffer from physical symptoms, but their symptoms don’t appear to have an obvious medical cause. Physicians call them somatizers. We call them Enigma Patients™ and they represent the largest unaddressed gap in population health management where a proven intervention exists.

What is an Enigma Patient?
Enigma Patients are symptom amplifiers – they have specific thoughts and behaviors that intensify their symptoms and cause them to seek repeat medical evaluations. These behaviors continue even when test results come back negative. Instead of feeling relieved, Enigma Patients fear that doctors are overlooking a serious disease. It’s a vicious cycle— the more reassurance these patients receive, the more they need.

It’s a common condition.
Enigma Patients can be found in all walks of life. Risk for somatization is greater in single female heads of households with lower income and educational levels. Research reveals that about 15% of primary care patients, and at least 25% of specialists’ patients are Enigma Patients. In fact, the prevalence of persistent medically unexplained symptoms is similar to diabetes.

The toll on patients, providers, and payers.
In addition to personal distress, Enigma Patients are burdened with long-term morbidity. They experience functional disability rates comparable to patients with cancer or heart disease. Enigma Patients cost payers two to three times as much as average patients (about 10% of every healthcare dollar), yet they never get better and they remain chronically dissatisfied with their care.

Why aren’t they on the radar?
If Enigma Patients represent a tremendous cost-saving opportunity then why have they been overlooked? Largely, it’s because there is no single diagnosis code that identifies them in the data that would make them an easy target for a condition-management program. Some of the Enigma Patients do have chronic diseases and may be caught by disease management programs, but these programs fail to address the underlying condition that drives Enigma Patients’ unnecessary use of healthcare services.

There is a solution. Enigma Health’s evidence-based program effectively treats patients with medically unexplained symptoms and decreases utilization.

Proven relief.
Enigma Health offers an evidence-based telehealth intervention proven to help these patients feel better, become more productive and reduce healthcare costs. Our program uses a customized form of cognitive-behavioral therapy developed under the clinical leadership of Harvard Medical School Professor Arthur Barsky, MD.

We find and engage the patients for you.
Until now, finding these elusive patients has been challenging—no diagnosis or procedure is sufficient to identify them. Enigma Health has developed a proprietary algorithm using claims data to identify Enigma Patients—patients whose excessive medical utilization is due to their struggle with medically unexplained symptoms. And our unique expertise with this patient population allows us to engage them in our program at rates unmatched in the industry. Our clinicians conduct sessions via phone or video chat at the patient’s convenience. Most patients notice significant improvement after only 3 sessions, and graduate from the program after 8 sessions.

As patients feel better, quality of life increases and utilization decreases.
Over 9 in 10 patients who complete the program report significant reductions in symptom severity and health-related anxiety. Research confirms that this type of intervention produces a sizeable decrease in healthcare utilization (15%+) and these real, measurable savings result in a positive ROI for payers. Providers experience less frustration, and patients are more satisfied with their providers and the care they receive. As patients gain control over their health and symptoms, their quality of life improves.

Let us help you identify, engage and treat this significant population of patients. Contact zhenya.abbruzzese@EnigmaHealth.com