



Partnerships Project: Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Ga., 1999–2001

One of our goals for this project from the onset was to implement curricular changes that would make managed care classroom content and clinical experiences an ongoing part of our Family Nurse Practitioner Program curriculum. This goal has been realized. Students are much less critical of managed care as the "problem" and have a better understanding of how to improve the system and reasons why difficulties occur. They are much more aware of population-based care and the positive outcomes of good disease management.

—Charlene Hanson, Ed.D., R.N., Project Director

Experts have ranked Georgia Southern University, which focuses on the preparation of nurse practitioners for rural practice, within the top 5 percent of nurse practitioner programs in the nation. For its project the university partnered with Georgia Healthcare Partnership, a managed care affiliate of Memorial Health University Medical Center in Savannah, Ga., and Magnolia Coastlands Area Health Education Center, headquartered in Statesboro, Ga., which serves rural south Georgia.

Results

The project accomplished the following:

- Created and integrated new curricula on systems thinking and redesign for quality improvement into two existing core courses and made managed care clinical practice a part of the required curriculum. The project faculty used Web-based technology and materials to teach both on-site and distance learning students and to draw on the experience of their managed care partners.
- Established a managed care clinical rotation for family nurse practitioner students.
- Implemented three brown-bag discussions between medical residents and family nurse practitioner students. Discussion topics were health care ethics, evidence-based care and working collaboratively.

According to Hanson, project director: "Our managed care partners remained strong in their commitment to the project. Certain areas such as the one-on-one site experiences for students at the Georgia HealthCare Partnership administrative offices were especially

good and well received by students. They learned a great deal about health care systems and networks and about billing and reimbursement issues."

Hanson also noted that the project provided nursing faculty an opportunity to learn along with the students, to broaden their perspective on managed care, and helped them to engage faculty drawn from their managed care partners. Overall the project had a positive impact on the school of nursing.

Problems Faced

According to Hanson: "Less successful was the attempt to teach content in an interdisciplinary format with residents at the medical school [the brown bag discussions]. Although the leaderships from both campuses supported it, there was resistance from medical faculty. [Nurse practitioner] students attended but were disappointed in the amount of interaction." She elaborated: "Medicine and nursing as separate professions have lots of baggage and are extremely resistant [to collaborations] in some cases."

She noted also that students had some difficulty planning and completing research projects that were managed care-based.

A further difficulty involved the clinic rotations. "When the original rotations were scheduled there was some resistance to spending time in the Georgia Healthcare Partnerships' offices learning about systems management, appeals, billing, referrals, etc. Students wanted to remain in clinical settings. However, after the experience they wrote very positive evaluations about the experience and felt it was extremely worthwhile.

Students Benefited

Nurse practitioner students in the project had this to say:

- *My observational experience at Georgia Healthcare Partnerships was eye opening. I never realized how the process for accepting or denying reimbursement for care was carried out.*
- *This experience really helped me to understand how to make an appropriate referral.*
- *The appeals process is really in the patient's favor. I didn't expect that to be so.*
- *Having us do billing and coding and "E and M" (evaluation and management) documentation for each patient we saw will really help me in practice. I feel much more competent to face this task.*

Hanson concludes that as a result of the project, students are willing to use the knowledge [gained in their managed care rotations] as they moved on to more clinical experiences in direct patient care settings. "As nurses, these learners have often not been on the front

line of understanding the financial implications of how care is delivered and this was very important content."

Regarding their coursework: "Overall, I feel our students in this project would rate the changes made in our clinical course to include managed care experience as very important. They also highly valued the didactic content about the evolution of the health care system to one of managed care, and the content about disease management."

Looking Ahead

As a result of this project, the family nurse practitioner project integrated managed care content and Web-based resources into two core courses and planned to make managed care clinical experiences a required part of the training project.