How Transparency and Accountability Policy Directions Could Reflect the Contributions of Hospital Nurses

Nursing engagement in performance measurement and public reporting

SUMMARY

Mounting health care costs, misaligned reimbursement systems and suboptimal quality have prompted employers, health care purchasers and health policy-makers to call for the creation of performance measures and transparency in reporting provider performance. More recently, experts have started to use those performance measures as the basis for incentive programs such as "pay-for-performance" initiatives that reward high-performing health care providers.

Several studies and initiatives have resulted in widely accepted performance measures that quantify the contribution of nurses in acute care settings, but less attention has been paid to the use of those measures as the basis for payment or incentives for nurses.

The purpose of this project, according to Project Director Ellen Kurtzman, RN, MPH, FAAN, "was to better understand how transparency and accountability policy directions could reflect the contributions of hospital nurses in more direct and meaningful ways."

A national advisory committee of nursing leaders and other health care experts provided technical, political, tactical and strategic guidance to the project. See the Appendix for a list of national advisory committee members.

Activities

Researchers at the George Washington University Medical Center:

- Interviewed 75 hospital executives, acute care nurses and hospital board members at 25 hospitals; and 20 state and federal policy-makers and other national experts: 39 by telephone and 56 in person during site visits to seven of the 25 hospitals. Interviews solicited stakeholders' perceptions on issues such as the extent to which performance measures that reflect nursing care were in place, and how nurses contribute to the quality of hospital care and to policies (including pay-for-performance) that reflect nurses' contributions.
Conducted two reviews of evidence:

— One focused on evidence describing:
  - The existence and use of performance measures that reflect nursing care quality.
  - Public reporting of these performance data.
  - Value-based purchasing programs (attempts by purchasers to improve health care quality when negotiating payments to providers).

— One explored research regarding associations between inpatient nursing care and cost and quality.

Analyzed the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services’ 2008 hospital-acquired conditions policy, which eliminates additional Medicare payments to hospitals for cases in which one of 10 hospital-acquired conditions occurs during hospitalization. Since research shows that nurses play a role in reducing the incidence of four of these conditions, the policy provides a means for nurses to measure their economic contribution to quality care. Researchers reported results in an article entitled "New Medicare Payment Rules: Danger or Opportunity for Nursing?" in the American Journal of Nursing, 2008.

Prepared a policy brief on safety and quality for the American Academy of Nursing: Nurses Helping Americans Cross the Quality Chasm: A Position Paper from the American Academy of Nursing.

Key Results and Recommendations

Researchers proposed a framework for a system to measure, report and reward nursing’s contributions to quality, safety and value. This framework includes 22 recommendations in the areas of priority setting, performance measurement, public reporting, data quality and availability, and rewards and incentives.

An article published in Nursing Economics, "A Transparency and Accountability Framework for High Value Inpatient Nursing Care," describes the framework. (See the Bibliography.)

Results of Interviews With Stakeholders (as reported to RWJF)

Because Kurtzman has manuscripts in review and in process, this report cannot be more specific about the results of the interviews at this time.

Nine topics could be identified from the interviews such as the critical role of nurses in patient safety and health care quality, the inevitability of performance measurement, public reporting of measures and value-based purchasing initiatives, and the negative consequences of financial incentives on hospitals and their nurses.
• Hospital executives in various roles (e.g., chief executive officer, chief nursing officer, chief operating officer, chief financial officer) generally viewed these topics similarly while differences could be detected among unit nurses and the other respondents.

• Based on these interviews, specific recommendations were generated that address practice, education, policy and research.

• Interviews of hospital executives, board members, nurses and policy-makers elicited a common concern: "that nurses, who represent the single largest health care workforce, are disproportionately influenced by these policies yet [they are] invisible in their development and expression."

**Results of the Evidence Reviews**

• Researchers reported results of the evidence review regarding performance measures, public reporting and value-based purchasing in an article entitled "The Current State of Nursing Performance Measurement, Public Reporting, and Value-Based Purchasing," published in *Policy, Politics, & Nursing Practice*. (Abstract available online.)

  They concluded that although the nursing professional is the single largest profession within health care and despite nursing's acknowledged role in patient safety and health care outcomes, nurses have been largely absent from policy setting in the areas of measurement, public reporting of performance and value-based purchasing. The research team proposed an action agenda that would reconcile the current state with that which would be ideal for nursing and patient care.

• Researchers reported results of the evidence review regarding inpatient nursing's contribution to cost and quality ("The Contribution of Nursing to High-Value Inpatient Care," published in *Policy, Politics, & Nursing Practice*). (Abstract available online.)

  They concluded that there are significant gaps in the evidence base regarding the relationship between nursing and value. They go on to say: "And while research substantiating nursing’s contribution to value needs to be strengthened to be actionable, research alone will not achieve this aim. …[A]rguments based on scientific, economic, social, and political bases must be made to stimulate national action."

**Communications Results**

• Researchers wrote nine articles published in peer-reviewed journals as well as three reports. They plan on writing additional articles.

• Researchers presented at 17 regional, national and televised conferences (such as the Wisconsin Federation of Nurses & Health Professionals and the National Healthcare Incentives Institute)
See the Bibliography for details.

Funding

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) supported this project with a grant of $324,203 to George Washington University between June 2007 and September 2009.

Afterward

The project influenced the planning and implementation of a national Nursing Alliance for Quality Care established in January 2010 to engage the nursing community in policy setting related to quality, safety and value. RWJF awarded a grant (ID# 064663) to the George Washington University Medical Center in September 2008 to plan for the alliance. A second, two-year grant (ID# 066729) awarded in January 2010 provides support for the implementation of the alliance. The first meeting of its board of directors was held in February 2010.

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APPENDIX

National Advisory Committee

(Current as of the date of this report; provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF.)

(Positions as of their time of appointment)

**Mary Wakefield, PhD, RN, FAAN (Co-Chair through January 2009)**
Director and Professor, Center for Rural Health at the School of Medicine and Health Sciences
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**Dennis O'Leary, MD (Co-Chair)**
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**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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**Articles**


**Meetings & Presentations**

Ellen T. Kurtzman, “Nursing Engagement in Performance Measurement and Reporting,” at the Congress on Nursing Practice and Economics business meeting, American Nurses Association (ANA), September 30, 2007, Silver Spring, MD.


Ellen T. Kurtzman, “Quality Care Measurement: Friend or Foe to Frontline Workers,” at the Professional Issues Conference, Wisconsin Federation of Nurses & Health Professionals (WFNHP), April 17, 2009, Milwaukee.
