

NH Nursing Workforce Partnership Project Home Health Proposal – wound care training portion

Throughout New Hampshire, caring for many types of wounds is among the top reasons physicians and hospitals refer to home care. According to Linda Fraser, State Medicare OASIS Coordinator, during the period September 30, 2002 – January 31, 2003, New Hampshire home health agencies admitted 3,827 patients with wound care needs. This number rises to over 6,000 patients cared for with wounds during that same period when patients continuing on care are added. Clearly, wound care skills are a critical need for home health nurses.

The cost of wound care is one of the most expensive home care treatments, both in terms of nursing visits and medical supplies. Hence, it is imperative to optimize the efficiency of the care delivered. Physicians still frequently order normal saline wet to dry dressings twice a day, necessitating multiple nursing visits. Frequent dressings are difficult in home care, particularly in rural areas where there is often limited staff availability and where driving distances to clients can be substantial. While twice daily or more frequent dressing changes are appropriate for some wounds, there many new products on the market that have resulted in a 50% decrease in nursing visits. Physicians are more likely to agree to use these new products and treatments if home health nurses are skilled in their use.

Increasing the number of trained, certified wound care specialists in home care will improve patient outcomes and lower healthcare costs by avoiding costly hospitalizations and re-hospitalizations; improving supply management and associated costs; increasing physician acceptance and respect for the nurse's clinical recommendations on wound care; and bridging communication and advancing cooperation and resource exchange among disciplines.

While many agencies have dedicated nurses who primarily see wound patients, only 5 of the 30 home health agencies that responded to an HCANH survey have a Certified Wound Care Specialist on staff, and only one agency has more than one nurse with that certification. Of the 30 agencies, 26 stated they would send several home health nurses to an educational program that would increase the skill level of nurses and prepare interested staff for certification as wound care specialists. HCANH estimates that as many as 25 nurses would take the certification exam following the program.

The goal was to bring an intermediate course on current concepts in wound healing to home care nurses. HCANH selected a three-day program produced by the Center for Continuing and Professional Education at Southwest Missouri State University, which was delivered four times during the grant period at sites around the state beginning in the Fall of 2003 and finishing in the Winter/Spring of 2004. The program offered an optional practicum experience, and preparation for certification exams.

As noted above, the training will serve as a certification prep course for those otherwise eligible to take the wound care certification exam offered by the American Academy of Wound Management or Wound, Ostomy, and Continence Nurses Society; however the

primary goal was skill and knowledge building. This three-day course provided participants with the basic, practical groundwork of knowledge for immediate delivery of appropriate skin/wound care, including assessment, documentation, management and clinical skills. It also involved presentation of the most recent products and advanced wound care modalities proven to manage/heal wounds successfully. Participants gained proficiency and the ability to implement treatment plans after completing this program.

Results –

A total of 177 home care nurses from 35 different agencies attended the 4 sessions on wound care. Out of those attendees, 74 expressed interest in the optional practicum with 25 actually completing the experience. Three wound centers around the state cooperated in providing these experiences – The Wound Care Center at Portsmouth Hospital, The Wound Healing Institute at Wentworth Douglass Hospital in Dover, and The Wound Center at Catholic Medical Center in Manchester. Many nurses expressed interest in wound care certification, but only a few met all the criteria to sit for the exam during the Grant period.

A Wound Care Steering Committee composed of representative from about 12-15 agencies, working with a certified wound care specialist has been meeting monthly to discuss and consult with one another on difficult cases, product selections, protocol development, and best practices for supply management. This steering committee identified a need for and organized a specific educational program on the wound care section of the OASIS form that has been offered twice. A total of about 60 nurses have attended and a video will be available for purchase for ongoing education of staff.