Progress in assessing the quality of Australian nursing home care

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Abstract: This paper critically examines the clarity, practicality, desirability and validity of the 31 outcome standards that the Commonwealth Government introduced to assess quality of care in Australian nursing homes. Key features of the Australian system in an international context are its focus on outcomes, the limited number of standards used, and the comparatively subjective nature of some standards. Directors of nursing from 410 nursing homes in the Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide metropolitan areas were interviewed as part of the Nursing Home Regulation in Action Project. The overwhelming majority reported the standards as clear and desirable. In the minority of cases where problems were raised, practicability was the basis for concern. A factor analysis of the ratings given by standard monitoring teams to these 410 homes failed to demonstrate redundancy across standards or grouping of standards by objectives. Nevertheless, the standards were sufficiently highly interrelated to justify summing to produce an overall compliance score. This study shows that the 31 standards hold up well under scrutiny, both from the perspectives of key actors in the monitoring process, and from a psychometric point of view. (Aust J Public Health 1992; 16: 89-97)

Since 1987, the Commonwealth Government has implemented a program of nursing home regulation which, from an international perspective, is both innovative and sophisticated in its conception. The approach involves the systematic assessment of nursing homes in terms of 31 criteria. The criteria are outcome oriented, focusing more on the extent to which the nursing home achieves quality care than on how it goes about accomplishing such goals. Furthermore, the outcome standards have been designed to give as much emphasis to quality-of-life issues as to the more traditional concerns of quality nursing care. The limited number of standards constitutes a potentially efficient system for nursing home evaluation, providing the standards are comprehensive and clear. The purpose of this paper is to provide a preliminary examination of the clarity, practicality, desirability, and internal consistency of the 31 standards currently in use by standards monitoring teams.

Historical emergence of the 31 standards

Prior to the Giles Report, the Commonwealth involvement in nursing home inspections was limited. First, financial inspections were undertaken to check the accuracy of benefit claims. Second, medical assessments categorised residents as requiring either ordinary or extensive care for purposes of benefit levels. Third, status inspections checked physical facilities, cleanliness and the adequacy of staffing levels. The latter were input oriented, the assumption presumably being that with the correct materials and resources, quality care would automatically follow.

In recent years, the meaning of quality of care in nursing homes has been widely debated. The United States, the National Citizens’ Coalition for Nursing Home Reform and the Institute of Medicine Report have had a major impact on regulatory practice by addressing quality-of-life issues. In a study sponsored by the Coalition for Nursing Home Reform, Spalding sought the opinions of 455 articulate residents on what constituted high quality of life and care in a nursing home. Of highest importance was the quality of interactions with staff—how helpful, friendly, competent and cheerful they were. Privacy, opportunity for choice, and food quality and quality were also of concern to the residents. The Institute of Medicine Report took up these issues: ‘Many aspects of nursing home life that affect a resident’s perceptions of quality of life—and therefore, sense of well-being—are intimately intertwined with quality of care’ and extended traditional notions of quality of care to include residents’ ‘sense of satisfaction with oneself, the environment, the care received, the accomplishment of desired goals, and control over one’s life’ (p. 51). The change in the way

References

1. Ministerial Inquiry into the Recruitment and Retention of General Practitioners in Western Australia (Kamin M, Chairman): Report, Perth: Department of Community Services, University of Western Australia, December 1987.
The results

These findings suggest that the opportunity for the RN to begin to assess some of the issues of care management and quality assurance in action projects is a

The NURSING HOME AGENCY REGULATION IN ACTION PROJECT

The success of any program in the home health care field is dependent on a great deal of coordination and cooperation between the various agencies involved. The project of this type of program requires the close collaboration of the home health agency, the social service agency, the hospital, and the family members of the patient. The project is designed to provide a framework for the development and implementation of a home health care program that is responsive to the needs of the patient and the community. The project is intended to be a model for future programs and to serve as a basis for the development of other similar programs.

The Standards in Practice

The standards in practice (see Appendix A) are designed to guide the home health agency in the implementation of the project. The standards are based on the results of the project and are intended to reflect the best practices in the field. The standards are designed to be flexible and to allow for the development of innovative approaches to the care of home health patients.

The Measurement of Performance

The project measured the level of performance of the home health agency in the implementation of the project. The measurement was based on the results of the project and was designed to reflect the level of performance of the agency.

The Impact of the Project

The project had a significant impact on the home health agency and on the patients served by the agency. The project resulted in a number of changes in the agency's operations and in the level of care provided to its patients. The project also resulted in a number of changes in the agency's policies and procedures.

The Evaluation of the Project

The project was evaluated on the basis of the results of the project and on the feedback received from the agency and the patients served by the agency. The evaluation was designed to assess the effectiveness of the project and to identify areas for improvement.

The Lessons Learned

The project provided a number of lessons that can be applied to future projects. These lessons include the importance of collaboration, the need for careful planning, and the importance of continuous evaluation.

The Future of Home Health Care

The project has demonstrated the potential of home health care as a viable and effective means of providing care to patients in their homes. The project has also shown the importance of collaboration and the need for careful planning in the development of home health care programs.
There is a significant correlation between the different categories of the Australian Nursing Home Care Standards. The table below shows the correlation coefficients for the seven objectives:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Health care</td>
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<td>3. Emotional well-being</td>
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<td>4. Intellectual stimulation</td>
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<td>7. Quality of care</td>
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Note: The correlation coefficients range from -1 to 1, with values closer to 1 indicating a stronger positive correlation, and values closer to -1 indicating a stronger negative correlation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
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<th>Item Total</th>
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Table: 2. Factor analysis of the 31 outcome standards and item-total correlations

*Assessing Nursing Home Care*
CONCLUSION

The impact of the research will not only be enhanced by its contributions to the field of public health but also by its potential for informing health policy and practice. The findings of this study provide evidence for the development of effective interventions that can address the identified concerns and improve health outcomes. The results also highlight the importance of continued research in this area.

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