

Measuring Nursing Care Time and Tasks in Long-Term Services and Supports: One Size Does Not Fit All

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ABSTRACT

Background: Although most staff in long-term care services and support (LTSS) are nursing care personnel, a method for measuring the provision of nursing care has not yet been developed.

Purpose/Methods: We sought to understand the challenges of measuring nursing care across different types of LTSS using a qualitative approach that included the triangulation of data from three unique sources.

Results: Six primary challenges to measuring nursing care across LTSS emerged. These included (a) level of detail about time of day, amount of time, or type of tasks varied by type of nursing and organization; (b) time and tasks were documented across clinical records and administrative databases; (c) data existed in both paper and electronic formats; (d) several sources of information were needed to create the fullest picture of nursing care; (e) data were inconsistently available for contracted providers; and (f) documentation of informal caregiving was unavailable. Differences were observed between assisted living facilities and home- and community-based services compared with nursing homes. Differences were also observed across organizations within a setting. A commonality across settings and organizations was the availability of an electronically stored care plan specifying individual needs, but not necessarily how these would be met.

Conclusions: Findings demonstrate the variability of data availability and specificity across three distinct LTSS settings. This study is an initial step toward establishing a process for measuring the provision of nursing care across LTSS in order to explore the range of nursing care needs of LTSS recipients and how these needs are currently fulfilled.

KEY WORDS:

long-term care, nursing, measurement.

Introduction

Long-term care services and support (LTSS) encompass a broad set of programs and services. Offered in a variety of settings, these programs and services are designed to meet the needs of people coping with physical, functional, cognitive, and other deficits typically associated with multiple chronic illnesses and major disabilities (Institute of Medicine, 2001). In the United States, LTSS have traditionally been provided in nursing homes (NHs), which regularly care for more than 1.5 million residents nationwide. Nursing homes are characterized as places of residence providing constant care. Approximately, 88% of NH residents are over the age of 65 years and 83% receive services to support living with impairments in three or more activities of daily living (Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, 2011; Gabrel, 2000). The growing number of older adults, a shortage of NH beds, increasing costs, and the improved overall health of new cohorts of elders have led to the creation of a number of alternatives during the last 20–30 years.

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