The Difference is in the Evidence

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To celebrate the 45th anniversary of The Wound Ostomy Continence Society Annual meeting, OWM turned the soapbox over to its Executive Vice President for a look at the status of the WOC nurse in healthcare.

In 2010, The Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nurses Society™ (WOCN®) contracted with the University of Minnesota to conduct a research study to examine the outcomes of patients with and without treatment from a Wound, Ostomy and Continence (WOC) nurse. Results of this study were recently published in the Journal of Wound, Ostomy and Continence (JWOCN).¹

This is the largest, most comprehensive study to date; it included more than 400,000 episodes of care in 785 home health agencies. The study used controlled agencies where patients could be monitored long-term to measure variables over time in a structured way. Results showed that home health care (HHC) agencies with a WOC nurse had significantly better outcomes for both improvement and stabilization of wounds, urinary and bowel incontinence, and urinary tract infections when compared to HHC agencies without a WOC nurse. Although the study was conducted in agency settings, the same nursing principles and care strategies carry over to other care settings.

The results of this study come at an incredibly important and dynamic time for everyone involved with healthcare, and especially WOC nurses. The landscape is rapidly changing and shifting; the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) are urging healthcare systems and hospitals to work toward reducing hospital-acquired conditions, including pressure ulcers and catheter-associated urinary tract infections. This study demonstrates conclusively the direct link between the work that WOC nurses do and improvements in patient care and outcomes, and a reduction in costs for healthcare systems.

How Employers and Patients Benefit from WOC Nurses

A WOC nurse serves as a clinical expert, educator, consultant, researcher, and administrator, playing a pivotal role in providing optimal care for patients in multiple healthcare settings. Their versatility, coupled with their specialized knowledge and a keen commitment to care, make WOC nurses an asset to a team in any healthcare setting. Employers can benefit from employing a certified WOC nurse because WOC nurses have been shown to help to shorten lengths of stay, prevent readmissions in hospital settings, and ensure healthcare institutions get the maximum payment for patients using Medicare and Medicaid services. The recent study shows that with a WOC nurse on staff, patients in HHC facilities were:

- Nearly twice as likely to show improvement in pressure ulcer healing
- 20% more likely to show improvement in lower extremity ulcers
- 40% more likely to show improvement in surgical wounds
- 40% more likely to show improvement in urinary incontinence
- 14% more likely to have improvement in bowel incontinence.

No matter the healthcare setting, WOC nurses deliver better patient care than nonspecialist nurses. And, WOC nurses help healthcare institutions cut down on readmission costs and lengths of stay.

Of course, we are preaching to the choir. Now, you have the evidence base to sing your own praises. OWM is proud and honored to support the work and dedication of this fine group of nursing professionals.

Reference