

*The Wisconsin Nursing Community
Agenda for Health Care Reform*



NURSING'S AGENDA FOR HEALTH CARE REFORM

Introduction

Wisconsin's seventy-six thousand registered nurses are acknowledged leaders in our health care system, providing care in various settings throughout Wisconsin. Nurses are a critical part of the health care delivery system by promoting health and providing care during illness and disease throughout the lifespan of the individual. Among all providers, they are advocates in seeking, pursuing and ensuring coordination of health services. Wisconsin nurses understand the importance of an effective healthcare system that responds to the current and emerging health needs of individuals, families and communities. This document sets forth policy recommendations for healthcare system reforms that increase access, extend care to all persons and improve the health of the public. Wisconsin nurses call for reform that provides access to health care services for all and access to a full range of services for all individuals with an emphasis on four basic tenets of care. They are:

- **Prevention and health promotion**
- **Health literacy**
- **Patient safety**
- **Coordinated chronic disease management**

Underlying Principle: Access to Health Services For All

Wisconsin nurses believe it is essential that reform afford all persons in Wisconsin access to a standard package of evidence-based, quality healthcare services that provide a coordinated continuum of care across the lifespan. Access to services would include the following:

- *Health Promotion*
- *Illness and Disease Prevention*
- *Primary healthcare*
- *Outpatient professional services and therapies*
- *Coordinated disease management*
- *Emergency and acute care*
- *Mental health and substance abuse care*
- *Prescription drugs, medical supplies and equipment*
- *Hearing, oral health and vision care*
- *Rehabilitative and restorative care*
- *Long term care*
- *Palliative and end of life care*
- *School based services*

To provide access for all, we endorse the following strategies:

- Spread financial risk through increased access to existing and larger purchasing pools

- Achieve competence in healthcare organizations and individual healthcare providers
- Adequate funding and reimbursement levels are expected to support programs
- Promote billing and reimbursement systems that increase cost awareness, sensitivity and transparency among consumers, providers, employers and purchasers
- Stress health promotion and illness and disease prevention to reduce the need for the intensive resource investments in disease intervention
- Develop a sustainable healthcare workforce

Significant annual rises in healthcare costs and policy recommendations that curtail access to services cannot be allowed to go unchecked. The four tenets outlined in this position paper are derived from the belief that overall reform needs to begin by encouraging all healthcare providers, purchasers, consumers and policymakers to think in terms of a health agenda rather than a healthcare financing agenda.

Health Promotion and Illness and Disease Prevention

Goal: To build a delivery system that reinforces and reimburses preventive services across the life span and supports health consumers in being knowledgeable and engaged partners in preventive care strategies

Health is defined as "a state of well-being and capability to function in the face of changing circumstances" (Durch, Bailey, & Soto, 1997). Prevention is the cornerstone to optimal health. Preventive services help individuals become and stay healthy. These services range from primary prevention with focuses on health education, disease and injury prevention and those legislative and regulatory supported preventive strategies; to secondary prevention which focuses on screening, early detection and prompt treatment; to tertiary prevention which focuses on limiting the progression of disease. The goal to promote health across the life span by creating and assuring conditions in which all people of Wisconsin can achieve and maintain health throughout their lives.

Health includes both personal and societal dimensions. The personal dimension of health includes acquiring knowledge, acting upon that knowledge and creating healthful opportunities for individuals and families to make decisions. The societal dimension of health includes coordinated efforts within the community in partnership with the public health system to assure conditions that foster good health.

Illness and Disease Prevention is a major vehicle by which health status is attained and maintained. Coverage that does not provide access to preventive care will continue to increase costs as consumers invariably become subject to disease and require more treatment and services.

Wisconsin nurses support:

- Wisconsin's *Healthiest Wisconsin 2010: A Partnership Plan to Improve the Health of the Public*, which cites key priorities that influence both health and illness. Listed alphabetically below, they are:
 - Access to Primary and Preventive Health Services
 - Adequate and Appropriate Nutrition
 - Alcohol and Other Substance Use and Addiction Services

- Environmental and Occupational Health Hazards
- Existing, Emerging, and Re-emerging Communicable Diseases
- High Risk Sexual Behavior
- Intentional and Unintentional Injuries and Violence
- Mental Health and Mental Disorders
- Overweight, Obesity, and Lack of Physical Activity
- Social and Economic Factors that Influence Health
- Tobacco Use and Exposure

Health Literacy

Goal: To support consumers as they negotiate complex healthcare systems and use information to effectively enhance their health.

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) defines health literacy as “the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process and understand health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.” Health communication contributes to all aspects of health promotion and disease prevention. Communication is critical for people’s exposure to, search for and use of health information. This includes the ability to reduce or eliminate unhealthy behaviors and adopt healthy ones. Health illiteracy is associated with severe disease outcomes and more costly care. Higher costs result from medication and treatment errors, more hospitalizations, longer hospital stays, more provider visits and increased use of inappropriate emergency room services. Death rates from chronic disease, communicable disease and injuries are inversely related to the level of understanding health consumers have about their lifestyle choices, conditions, and treatment options. Consumers are faced with a number of challenges as they seek health information and search for strategies to navigate an increasingly complex health system.

Wisconsin nurses support:

- Consumer empowerment to make healthy and responsible choices and decisions
- Advocacy for and participation in educational activities that result in increased consumer and healthcare provider competencies
- Healthcare practitioners being provided the tools, skills and systems that support assessment of consumer health literacy
- Active participation by all practitioners to communicate good health practices beginning at infancy and continuing into adulthood
- Delivery of services that are culturally competent and reflective of individual health beliefs
- Consumer involvement in continuous learning and ongoing communication of information between caregivers, organizations and the general public
- Dissemination of information about population health risks through the construction and increased use of public health messages and campaigns
- Further development of online personal health records, health web sites, interactive personal health tools and telemedicine

Patient Safety

Goal: To effect fundamental and sustainable improvements in patient safety.

Patient safety is the prevention of healthcare errors and the elimination of patient injury caused by healthcare errors. (NPSF® Board July 2003). A healthcare error is defined as an unintended healthcare outcome caused by a defect in the delivery of care to a patient. Healthcare errors may be errors of commission (doing the wrong thing), omission (not doing the right thing), or execution (doing the right thing incorrectly). Errors may be made by any member of the healthcare team as well as a consumer in any care setting. They can happen at any point in the care process or result from a systems failure. It is estimated that nationally, between 44,000 and 98,000 (2000) patients die each year as a result of healthcare errors. This number exceeds deaths resulting from motor vehicle accidents, breast cancer and AIDS. The total costs associated with healthcare errors are estimated to be between \$17 billion and \$29 billion (IOM, 2004). Patients, their families and society suffer as a result of healthcare errors producing a wasteful drain on our limited health care resources. Errors are grossly underreported in most healthcare settings because of cultures that shame those involved or demand "silence" for fear of employer, civil and/or criminal actions (ISMP, 2004). It is impossible to correct errors if they are not reported. Errors that plague our healthcare system erode public trust.

Adequate registered nurse staffing and supportive practice environments are proving to be a strong influence in achieving good patient outcomes. Nurses are the surveillance system for early detection and intervention for adverse health occurrence. Studies reveal that for prevention of medication errors registered nurses intercepted 87% of all potential errors. (IOM, 2004). Research by Linda Aiken of the University of Pennsylvania cites that patient mortality rose seven percent for every additional patient added to the average nurse's workload. This study, as reported in the Journal of the American Medical Association on October 2002, affirms the critical role registered nurses play in patient safety when able to make direct assessment and life saving interventions. Further support for designing effective nurse work environments to promote patient safety comes from the Institute of Medicine Quality Chasm Series; *"Keeping Patients Safe: Transforming the Work Environment of Nurses,"* (National Academies of Science, 2004).

Wisconsin nurses support:

- Developing systems that protect the rights and responsibilities of all health care providers with respect to reporting activities or practices that jeopardize patient safety
- Legislation that protect individual healthcare providers from criminalization for unintentional medical errors
- Designing work environments and equipment that prevent and mitigate patient and staff injuries
- Optimizing a registered nurse workforce to maximize patient safety
- Using best practices to encourage health care organizations to become "magnet recognition" facilities which have higher retention rates and improved patient outcomes
- Promoting professional development and competencies of nurses with respect to creating and supporting patient safety systems
- Promoting patient safety by supporting professional organizations, agencies and associations that improve patient safety
- Implementing coordination strategies to reduce error in managing chronic disease

Coordinated Chronic Disease Management

Goal: To help people with chronic conditions prevent, delay, or minimize disease and disability progression, and maximize health and well being.

“Disease management is a system of coordinated healthcare interventions and communications for populations in which patient self-care efforts are significant. Disease management supports the practitioner/patient relationship and plan of care; emphasizes prevention of exacerbations and complications by utilizing evidence-based practice guidelines and patient empowerment strategies; and evaluates clinical, humanistic, and economic outcomes on an ongoing basis with the goal of improving overall health” (Disease Management Association of America, 2004). Disease management covers the continuum of chronic disease care. It extends from early detection (the identification of non-symptomatic, undiagnosed, or high-risk populations) and early interventions to prevention or reduction of the chronic disease risk complications through supportive end-of-life care. Disease management is a strategy concerned with an individual’s health over extended periods. It differs significantly from the current healthcare system that has been designed to deliver acute and episodic, but not chronic care.

Seventy-eight (JAMA, 1996) percent of all medical dollars are spent treating chronic disease, making people with chronic conditions our largest, highest-cost, and fastest-growing services group. The incidence of chronic disease increases with age, suggesting that the number of adults living with chronic disease will continue to increase as the number of older adults (aged 65 years and older) increases. By 2030 over 20% (JAMA, 2006) of the U.S. population will be 65 years and older. Just as noteworthy is the fact that although many of the individual affected be older adults, chronic disease affects children and adults of all ages.

The current health care infrastructure is not efficient in addressing the needs of persons with chronic conditions. Individuals with multiple chronic disease conditions require multiple health care practitioners that are specialists in treating and managing the specific disease. Individuals that have these multiple chronic disease states require coordination of all the care and services provided so that fragmented, duplicated, redundant and contraindicated care can be avoided. In addition, coordination of the complementary care and services that provide ongoing support to those with chronic conditions as well as their families is critical for effective disease management.

Wisconsin nurses support:

- Services that integrate and coordinate care across care delivery systems
- Programs that support advocacy for individuals with chronic disease and their families
- Activities that guide and support individuals in developing self-care management skills
- Technologies (e.g., telemedicine and shared electronic medical record and data collection systems) that support communication among individuals, healthcare providers and care delivery systems
- Elimination of regulatory and institutional barriers to services provided by qualified providers (e.g., advanced practice nurses, registered nurses, social workers, dieticians, therapists and other integrated health service providers) who deliver evidence-based prevention, health promotion and management of chronic disease

A Look toward the Future—Sooner, Rather Than Later

Increasing numbers of persons are either uninsured or underinsured, and the system’s inability to contain cost continues to place more people at risk when illness or disability occurs. Health

equity for underserved populations should be addressed effectively and quickly. Health policy and health spending have been dominated thus far by a focus on payment for medical treatment. More attention needs to be drawn to public policy and legislative initiatives that promote health within a person-centered, systems-oriented and coordinated approach.

Wisconsin nurses believe in ensuring access to the right care at the right time, in the right place and by the right provider. We believe that focusing on these four basic tenets – illness and disease prevention and health promotion, health literacy, patient safety, and coordinate chronic disease management, will improve the health status of individuals and society. Application of these principles will give people of all ages, race and socio-economic status improved health. For the people of Wisconsin, their productivity will be enhanced along with the realization that there are opportunities for a better quality of life. Health for all can be optimized by fully using the following strategies:

- Providing health promotion education in early childhood to develop behaviors that will be practiced throughout the life span
- Improving health literacy will support individual accountability for good health practices
- Promoting patient safety through an interdisciplinary model of care
- Partnering with system organizations to design products to improve coordination and quality of health care
- Improving health care provider safety through the development of effective equipment and use of technology
- Integrating evidence-based protocols in the management of disease to promote high quality, cost-efficient and safe health outcomes

We are all participants in our health care system and have responsibility for the future and evolution of the health of our society. Wisconsin's seventy-six thousand registered nurses are committed to working with partners to reform healthcare in Wisconsin.

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