



Pathway to better patient care and nurse workforce outcomes in home care

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ABSTRACT

Background: Unlike the Magnet Recognition Program, the newer Pathway to Excellence Program designed to improve work environments in a broader range of organizations has not yet been the focus of substantial research.

Purpose: The purpose of the study was to examine the association of Pathway to Excellence Program Standards with better patient care quality and workforce outcomes in home care.

Method: Cross-sectional survey of registered nurses yielded informants from 871 home care agencies in the United States. Variables representing each of the 12 Pathway Standards were entered into logistic regression models to determine associations with better patient care and nurse workforce outcomes.

Discussion: All Pathway Standards are strongly and significantly associated with better patient care and better workforce outcomes. Home care agencies with better-rated professional work environments consistently had better patient care and nurse workforce outcomes.

Conclusions: This study validates the Pathway to Excellence Standards as important to patient care quality and nursing workforce outcomes in home care.

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Although there is substantial research suggesting the attainment and maintenance of Magnet Recognition is an intervention associated with better work environments and better patient and nurse outcomes in hospitals, similar research on the newer Pathway to Excellence Program is lacking, especially related to nonhospital settings. The objective of this study was to validate whether Pathway to Excellence Program Standards are associated with better patient care quality and workforce outcomes in home care. If so, the Pathway

Program may become, as in the case of Magnet Recognition, a blueprint for an intervention to improve home care organizations as well as a means to recognize those with nursing excellence (Aiken, 2005; Clement, 2012).

Over three decades of research has established that the Magnet Recognition program is successful in identifying institutions with nursing excellence and that the Magnet Journey itself is an intervention to develop nursing excellence (Aiken, Smith, & Lake, 1994; Kutney-Lee et al., 2015; McHugh et al., 2013). A

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significant body of research also demonstrates the association of Magnet designation with improved hospital outcomes for patients and nurses (Friese, Xia, Ghaferi, Birkmeyer, & Banerjee, 2015; McHugh, Aiken, Eckenhoff, & Burns, 2016; McHugh et al., 2013; Witkoski-Stimpfel, Sloane, McHugh, & Aiken, 2016). Magnet has been very successful for hospitals around the globe, but few nonhospital health care organizations have taken the journey (Aiken, Buchan, Ball, & Rafferty, 2008; Aiken and Poghosyan, 2009; Walker and Aguilera, 2013).

Launched in 2009, the Pathway to Excellence Program requires health care organizations to meet 12 Standards for workplace excellence (Figure 1). Each Pathway Standard consists of detailed criteria that indicate the presence of good nurse work environments (American Nurses Credentialing Center [ANCC], 2016). The Pathway Program recognizes health care organizations in all settings that create positive work environments where nurses can excel in their practice and patient care. The Pathway to Excellence Program framework “provides a valuable infrastructure for transforming cultures in any settings where nurses work, regardless of the location and size (Pabico & Cadmus, 2016).” The Pathway Program is meant to enable a wider range of organizations, such as home care organizations, to qualify for Recognition and to be helped on the journey of improved work environments and better care outcomes.

There is an absence of evidence at present to determine whether the Pathway Program can identify organizations with excellent nursing and whether the Standards that are the core of the Program have promise as an intervention to move smaller organizations toward nursing excellence. Currently, no home care agency is recognized by either Pathway or Magnet (ANCC, 2016). Although previous research suggests that home care nurses value good professional work environments (Flynn, 2007; Mensik, 2007), only two studies

have documented the relationship between the work environment in home care and patient outcomes (Jarrín, Flynn, Lake, & Aiken, 2014; Tullai-McGuinness, Riggs, & Farag, 2011). No studies have shown a relationship between the work environment in home care and patient-care quality in terms of nursing care that is provided. Additionally, there is no empirical research on whether Pathway Standards are related to good patient care and outcomes in a home care organization context.

Methods

This study utilizes an observational, cross-sectional study design to examine the association between the Pathway Standards and (a) indicators of patient care quality and (b) nursing workforce outcomes in home care. Nurse survey data, collected by the Center for Health Outcomes and Policy Research at the University of Pennsylvania, contain information on the nurse work environment, nurse satisfaction and burnout, nurse demographics, and patient care quality indicators (Aiken et al., 2010). The term “nurses” in this study refers exclusively to registered nurses (RNs) working in home care who responded to a mailed survey in 2006 (Aiken et al., 2010).

Measurement of Pathway Standards

Following a review of the literature, questions on the nurse survey were mapped to each Standard, with most items drawn from items on the Practice Environment Scale of the Nursing Work Index (Lake, 2007) and ratings of patient safety environment from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality survey on patient safety culture (Blegen, Gearhart, O'Brien, Sehgal, & Alldredge, 2009). Graduate and undergraduate research assistants independently

1. Nurses control the practice of nursing
2. The work environment is safe and healthy
3. Systems are in place to address patient care and practice concerns
4. Orientation prepares nurses for the work environment
5. The Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) is qualified & participates in all levels of the organization
6. Professional development is provided and utilized
7. Equitable compensation is provided
8. Nurses are recognized for achievements
9. A balanced lifestyle is encouraged
10. Collaborative interdisciplinary relationships are valued and supported
11. Nurse managers are competent and accountable
12. A quality program and evidence-based practice are utilized

Figure 1 – ANCC Pathway to Excellence® Standards.

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