

Practice Toolkit: Long-term Care Research

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by Michelle Dougherty, RHIA, CHP

Research in long-term care (LTC) settings is critical to improving the quality of care and outcomes for residents. One challenge is keeping abreast of relevant studies. This column will focus on the International Severity Information Systems and Institute for Clinical Outcomes Research (ISIS/ICOR), which conducts clinical practice improvement studies to increase quality of care.

Specific to nursing homes, ISIS/ICOR conducted a large study on preventing pressure ulcers in LTC facilities. As a result of the study they published findings on three different topics:

Preventing pressure ulcers in LTC facilities: The objective of this study was to identify key characteristics of residents, treatments, and facilities associated with pressure ulcer development. Nutrition, staffing, medication, incontinence interventions, and early identification of pressure ulcer risk were significant contributors to preventing pressure ulcer development. The results of this study were reported in the March 2004 Journal of the American Geriatrics Society.

LTC nurse staffing: From the original pressure ulcer study, researchers were able to draw specific conclusions related to nurse staffing. More registered nurse (RN) time resulted in better outcomes and fewer pressure ulcers, urinary tract infections, hospitalizations, deaths, weight loss, deterioration of activities of daily living, catheters used, and an increased use of oral medical nutritional supplements. Thirty to 40 minutes of RN time per resident per day was optimal, but improvements could be seen by increasing time by 10-minute increments. Increased licensed practical nurse and nursing assistant time affected pressure ulcers, but not other outcomes or treatments. The results of the study will be published in the May 2005 Journal of the American Geriatrics Society.

Treatment of LTC residents with agitation in dementia therapy: Also springboarding from the original pressure ulcer study were findings related to treatment of agitation in dementia. Residents receiving typical monotherapy or no psychiatric medication had significant increases in pressure ulcer development (50 percent) than those on a combination therapy (17 percent). The best outcomes were found with combination therapy such as a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor antidepressant and an anti-anxiety agent.

Current ISIS/ICOR Projects

ISIS/ICOR currently has two research grants that should be of particular interest to HIM professionals: implementation of standardized documentation tools (related to pressure ulcer development) and best practices through automation. Both projects focus on implementation strategies and tools.

With the current grant, researchers are using standardized documentation tools with real-time feedback. Findings and recommendations will focus on how to help nursing homes change practice and address barriers to better, more complete documentation and communication. Preliminary findings have shown a link between nursing assistant documentation and quality, since nursing assistants manage a resident's incontinence and are the first to see signs of skin breakdown. If their observations are not documented and passed to nursing, the information is often lost. This study will focus on standards for communication that will promote the care process and early intervention.

The second implementation grant will address nursing home information technology related to optimal medication and care delivery. Researchers will use what they learned from their earlier research as the basis for developing electronic documentation screens. Study results will address best practices on how IT can bring information to the table to improve the care planning process.

Information on the research studies can be found on the ISIS/ICOR Web site, www.isisicor.com. Watch for the current study findings to be published—both have valuable information for LTC facilities and HIM practitioners.

References

Horn, Susan D., et al. “The National Pressure Ulcer Long-Term Care Study: Pressure Ulcer Development in Long-Term Care Residents.” *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 52 (2004): 359–67.

International Severity Information Systems, Inc., and the Institute for Clinical Outcomes Research (ISIS/ICOR). Available online at www.isisicor.com/.

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