RECOMMENDATION #7

Quantify the value of nursing care

Nurses are indispensable to the health care system, providing patient care that is critical for positive health outcomes and ensuring the smooth operation of health care facilities. Despite their vital contributions, nurses often face challenges in having the financial value of their work appropriately recognized. These challenges permeate various aspects of the health care system, affecting organizational culture, workforce planning, and the overall morale and effectiveness of nursing teams. This is a complex issue rooted in systemic, organizational, and societal factors that undervalue nurses' contributions to quality patient care and community well-being.

One of the root causes of the undervaluation of nursing care is the structure of health care payments. Because nursing services are often not billable to health care payers, they can sometimes be viewed as an organizational expense. Likewise, in value-based care models that evaluate quality measures, there has been less attention given to quantifying the value that nurses add to patient care and outcomes and the consequences of inadequate nursing care.

It is also relevant to note the societal factors influencing how nurses are valued in the health care system. Traditionally nursing has been a female-dominated profession, potentially leading to influences of gender bias. Stereotypes and societal perceptions can contribute to the devaluation of nursing as a "support" rather than a critical, autonomous field within health care.

Some nurses express that they experience being undervalued through a lack of recognition and respect from organizational leadership. Some find that their expertise and insights can be overlooked in clinical decision-making processes, with their contributions minimized or ignored in favor of those of other health care professionals. This has led many nurses to feel marginalized within the health care team, affecting their job satisfaction and sense of professional worth.

Inadequate value placed on nursing care can result in a variety of impacts:

- Organizational decision-making processes that fail to recognize the critical role of nurses can result in inadequate staffing levels if leaders prioritize cost-saving measures. When nurses are stretched too thin, the risk of errors increases, and the ability to provide compassionate, patient-centered care decreases.

- Nursing departments may receive less funding for essential equipment, continuing education, and support services compared to other departments. This can hinder nurses' ability to perform their duties effectively and safely, affecting both their job satisfaction and the patient experience.

- Nurses can experience wage discrepancies that do not reflect the complexity, demands, and critical nature of their work.

- Organizational leadership that undervalues nursing can fail to provide adequate opportunities for professional development and career advancement. This lack of investment in nurses' professional growth not only affects individual careers but also the overall quality of patient care.

Demonstrating the direct link between nursing care and patient outcomes can bolster the argument for better financial valuation. Research and case studies that illustrate how nurses contribute to cost savings, reduced readmission rates, and improved health outcomes can support this goal.

The Task Force on the Future of the Nursing Workforce recommends the following strategies to quantify the value of nursing care:

Strategy 20 – Use value-based payment and develop mechanisms to quantify the importance of nursing in quality care (Page 114)

Strategy 21 – Explore opportunities for nurses related to National Provider Identifier (NPI) numbers (Page 116)

Related Recommendations from Other Groups

Nurse Staffing Task Force. Nurse Staffing Task Force Imperatives, Recommendations, and Actions. American Association of Critical-Care Nurses and American Nurses Association; 2023

- **Recommendation: Advocate for the development and utilization of approaches that quantify nursing impact on organizational performance and outcomes**

- **Recommendation: Advocate for universal adoption and utilization of systems, including a unique nurse identifier, that capture data to quantify nursing value**

- **Recommendation: Collaborate with payers to explore health system payment models that reflect the value of nursing**