Clinical Nurse Specialist

The National Association of Clinical Nurse Specialists (NACNS) represents Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNSs) across the nation, there are approximately 70,000 of these expert nurse providers. Clinical Nurse Specialists are advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), who are licensed registered nurses with graduate degrees, at the master’s and/or doctoral level in a specialty. They have unique and advanced level competencies that can meet the increased needs of improving quality and reducing costs in the health care system. They are leaders of change in health organizations, developers of evidence-based programs to prevent avoidable complications, coaches of those with chronic diseases to prevent hospital readmissions, facilitators of teams in acute care and other facilities to improve the quality and safety of care and researchers seeking evidence-based interventions to improve the outcomes of care.

Clinical Nurse Specialists can meet the need to:

Increase the Effectiveness of Transitioning Care from Hospital to Home and Prevent Readmissions CNSs have demonstrated their ability to prevent readmissions as documented in a study of discharge planning from hospital to home care for the elderly. The studies showed fewer readmissions and fewer days of re-hospitalization in the group who received the service from the gerontological CNSs. Studies have also shown that programs developed by CNSs assist congestive heart failure patients with self-care to prevent hospital readmissions. Other studies have shown how very low birth weight infants can be discharged early from expensive neonatal intensive care units when the CNS is providing follow-up care after discharge.

Improve the Quality and Safety of Care and Reduce Health Care Costs by leading clinical teams, including physicians and nurses; to implement evidence-based system-wide changes to reduce infections, medical errors and costs in acute care facilities; as well as reduce hospital acquired conditions. Studies have shown a decrease in complications and costs by reducing pain and decreasing expensive ICU days when CNSs develop evidence-based practice guidelines to effectively address pain and to reduce the incidence of preventable pulmonary complications including ventilator acquired pneumonia, another source of high costs.

---

Educate, Mentor and Increase the Nursing Workforce Needed for an Improved Health System. CNSs educate staff nurses and nursing students in all practice settings by providing evidence based seminars, conferences, innovative training programs, clinical education and one to one mentoring of nurses. CNSs have developed programs that enhance the recruitment and retention of nurses new to their practice and mentored clinical practice projects that meet quality and safety goals of health care organizations. These elements of CNS practice build a nursing workforce ready and able to meet state and national goals related to safety and quality. Investing in the growth of the nursing workforce is essential to providing coverage that is meaningful and of high quality. Investing in the growth of the nursing workforce is essential to providing coverage that is meaningful and of high quality.

Increase Access to Community-based Care through the expansion of Nurse Managed Health Care Centers. CNSs provide expert clinical care in private offices and community clinics.

Increase the Availability of Effective Care for those with Chronic Illness. CNSs have distinguished themselves as effective coaches of those with chronic illness by promoting self-care and reducing the costs of the illness. Several studies document their efforts in care of the chronically ill, including those with heart failure, asthma, chronic pulmonary disease and epilepsy. In addition, CNSs have developed and demonstrated the effectiveness of community programs that identify those with COPD early slowing down the progression of their disease.

Improve Access to Wellness and Preventive Care by early identification of those at risk for costly chronic diseases, such as diabetes and heart failure and provide care to keep people healthy and prevent chronic conditions. A wellness company owned and managed by clinical nurse specialists provides ongoing care to employees to keep them healthy. An employer, who has engaged the services of this CNS enterprise to provide wellness care to their employees, saw their health care costs decreased and the annual increase in their health insurance premiums go to the single digits, as opposed to the previous double digit increases.

Specifically, Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNS) are advanced practice nurses who are:

- Licensed registered professional nurses with graduate degrees at the master’s and/or doctoral level
- Clinical experts in the diagnosis and treatment of illness in specialties across the continuum of care from neonatology to gerontology, including pediatrics, women’s health, oncology, mental health, cardiology, wellness and prevention.
- Practitioners providing evidence-based care in many settings including hospitals, rehabilitation facilities, outpatient offices and private clinics, and nursing homes.
- Direct providers of Medicare services
- Prescribers of medications and medical supplies for their patients in 38 states.
- Coordinators of care across settings
- Leaders and facilitators of change among large groups and organizations to facilitate quality improvement, patient safety and lower health care costs.
- Researchers in identifying effective interventions with proven outcomes.

---


xvii Nancy Dayhoff, Clinical Solutions, LLC