Understanding the Individual, Organizational, and System Factors Influencing the Integration of the Nurse Practitioner Role in Long Term Care Settings in Canada

Research Team

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Background: There is substantial evidence that access to quality primary healthcare services for older adults living in LTC settings, a vulnerable and often invisible population in society, is declining. In Canada, there is growing interest in the use of nurse practitioner (NP) roles to address this challenge. Despite evidence supporting their benefits in LTC, there are consistent reports about barriers to successful NP role integration reducing their ability to provide effective care to residents and creating problems with recruitment and retention.
**Objective:** This project addresses three priority themes from the *Listening for Direction II Report: nursing leadership, organization and policy; workforce planning, training and regulation; and timely access to quality care for all*. The objective of this study is to fully explore the integration of the NP role in the Canadian LTC health system so that the full potential of this role can be realized and timely access to quality care can be ensured for a growing population of LTC residents.

**Methods:** The study will use a sequential two-phase mixed-methods design. In Phase I, a national cross-sectional survey of NPs in LTC settings will be used to gather a broad range of information about their current roles, practice patterns, and job satisfaction. Phase II will consist of case studies at selected sites and will include: site visits; individual interviews with NPs, administrators and health care team members; focus groups with residents and family members; and document analysis. In addition, telephone interviews will be conducted with funders of current NP positions and with administrators in LTC settings where the NP position has not been filled or has been vacated. Descriptive statistics will be used to summarize quantitative survey data and depending on the number of surveys received, appropriate statistical analysis will be used to assess the strength of associations and differences. Thematic content analysis will be used to analyze qualitative data within and across cases.

We have constituted a highly skilled multidisciplinary, inter-provincial team of 14 researchers and 6 decision-maker partners to address a major health human resource issue. Our knowledge translation plan involves the use of methods such as briefing notes, short presentations, one-page abstracts, reports using the 1:3:25 format, peer-reviewed journal publications, conference presentations, regional workshops, an on-line forum, and press conferences to reach diverse audiences (residents and families, LTC health care professionals, managers, and policy makers) who will find the study relevant.

**Potential Contribution:** This study will document and analyze the role of NPs in LTC settings across Canada and will identify nursing leadership approaches for supporting the integration of NPs into the complex LTC work environment. It will provide valuable information about the individual, organizational and system factors that inhibit or facilitate recruitment and retention of NPs in LTC settings, implementation of the NP scope of practice in LTC, additional basic and continuing education required by the NPs, and the relationships between NPs in LTC and other disciplines. Practical strategies to assist in the effective integration of NPs into LTC settings will be developed such as a toolkit for administrators and directors of care to use for planning, recruiting, implementing, and integrating the NP into their LTC settings. NPs have the potential to reduce emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and costs while improving access to care. By informing workforce planning, the results of this inquiry will enable enhancements in the timeliness and quality of care for residents in LTC settings.