

Long-Term Care Survey Alert

Quality Improvement: A Physician Extender Visit A Day Can Keep Hospitalizations Away

Use of PAs/NPs in nursing facilities reduces ED visits and hospital readmissions.

Nursing homes looking for ways to cut down on their patients' visits to emergency departments and hospitalizations should consider the daily use in their facilities of physician extenders, such as physician assistants (PAs), advanced practice nurses (APNs), and nurse practitioners (NPs). Read on to see if this professional staff model could work in your facility.

Why might you consider enhanced team models and roles for your facility? "Well," says **Alice Bonner, RN, PhD**, CMS' director of the division of nursing homes, survey and certification group, "there is a growing body of evidence that long term care residents benefit from these kinds of models, specifically improved clinical outcomes, lowered hospitalization rates and decreased costs (see the CMS Special Study on Potentially Avoidable Transfers box on pg. 58 of this issue).

Tae Joon Lee, MD, CMD, medical director for Golden Living Center in Greenville, North Carolina agrees. "Research has shown that nursing facilities that have a physician, NP or PA to see patients at least three times a week in the building are much less likely to end up with their patients being admitted to the hospital," he notes.

Provide needed treatments

The reason for this is fairly simple and straightforward. "Most nursing homes today have the capacity to take care of many of the conditions, such as pneumonia, bronchitis, UTIs, and CHF exacerbations, which are the cause of the ED visit and/or hospital admission. But if there is no provider available in the facility to examine the patient and plan out the care, then the easiest thing for the staff to do is send them to the hospital," Lee explains.

Lee's facility employs a full-time nurse practitioner who works from 8am to 5pm Monday through Friday. "When she first comes into the building, even before she drops her stuff down in the office, she goes around and asks every single nurse down each hallway, 'Is there anybody sick? Is there anybody who needs to be looked at today?' These individuals then become our priority and we make sure that we examine them that day," Lee notes.

Night/weekend coverage: But what about nights and weekends when the NP isn't there? Because Golden Living Center is a teaching facility associated with East Carolina University (ECU), they also have access to geriatric fellows, NPs and PAs who take turns carrying the nursing home pager. "We encourage these providers to come and see the patient over the weekend, and we provide a financial incentive for the NPs to do that because they will get reimbursed for the visit," Lee explains.