

CONTAINING HEALTH CARE COST: THE UTILIZATION OF CERTIFIED REGISTERED NURSE ANESTHETISTS IN THE US AND ABROAD

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Abstract

Health care related costs across the globe have followed an upward trend in recent years. Expenditure in the United States has reached an all time high, with total health expenditures reaching 2.3 trillion in a 2008 estimate (Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, 2010). Increased health care costs worldwide can be attributed to new technologies, an aging population, and increase in obesity and chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol (Kaiser, 2010). Hospitals are constantly seeking ways to improve health care and decrease costs. Innovative methods aimed at improving health care and decreasing costs include switching to electronic medical records, hospitals adopting a surgical safety checklist to decrease postoperative complications (Semel et al, 2010), and an emphasis on health promotion and preventative care, among others.

Another approach to containing health care cost which emerged lately is the use of Advanced Practice Registered Nurses such as Nurse Practitioners, Certified Nurse Midwives (CNMs), and Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs). Advanced Practice Registered Nurses provide holistic, cost effective care to patients in inpatient and outpatient settings. The Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist, a type of anesthesia provider utilized in both inpatient and outpatient settings, is a cost effective strategy utilized by hospitals in the United States. Whether supervised or unsupervised, CRNA delivered anesthesia is more cost effective to hospitals than physician delivered anesthesia alone (Hogan et al, 2010).

Countries across the globe may have different healthcare constraints and realities. However, they stand to benefit from sharing knowledge about healthcare cost constraints. The experience of the United States in using Advanced Practice Nurses, specifically Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists, where possible for doctors as a cost reduction measure can be generalized to other countries to reduce cost and improve health care.

The objective of this literature review based study is twofold. First, the utilization of Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists as anesthesia providers to reduce health care costs in the United States is explored. Second, a framework which is designed to facilitate the applications of the US experience in other countries is presented. The methodology for this study is based on a

review of the literature and field interviews with hospital administrators. In the process, the extent of utilization of CRNAs in different health care cultural settings is explored.

References

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