

Is Nursing Home Care Improving?

Berlowitz DR, Bezerra HQ, Brandeis GH, Kader B, Anderson JJ. Are we improving the quality of nursing home care: the case of pressure ulcers. J Am Geriatr Soc 2000;48:59-62.

Study Overview

Objective. To determine whether rates of pressure ulcer development in nursing homes have changed over time.

Design. Retrospective database analysis.

Setting and participants. 30,510 residents at 107 National HealthCare Corporation (NHC) nursing homes in 9 states located primarily in the southeastern United States. The researchers used observations from the Minimum Data Set (MDS) [1], a comprehensive assessment instrument that contains detailed data related to the clinical, behavioral, and social status of nursing home residents. Assessments are performed by registered nurses at the time of admission, every 90 days in stable patients, and at times of significant change in health status. NHC MDS data have been used previously in studies of pressure ulcers in nursing homes [2].

Main outcome measures. Risk-adjusted rates of stage 2 or more severe pressure ulcer development in residents initially ulcer-free, and the proportion of newly developed ulcers that were severe (ie, stage 3 or 4). Ulcers are classified according to severity of skin breakdown, ranging from stage 1 (persistent area of skin redness that does not disappear when pressure is relieved) to stage 4 (full-thickness skin loss exposing muscle and/or bone).

Main results. Based on 144,379 observations of 30,510 residents between 1991 and 1995, there was a significant ($P < 0.05$) decline of more than 25% in the risk-adjusted rate of development of pressure ulcers (from 2.7% to 1.9%). Also, the proportion of new ulcers that were stage 3 or 4 declined by about one quarter, from 30% to 22% ($P < 0.01$).

Conclusion

Over a 5-year period, nursing homes showed a consistent and significant improvement in the prevention of pressure ulcers, including severe pressure ulcers. This suggests significant improvements in the overall quality of care provided by nursing homes.

Commentary

Since the publication of an Institute of Medicine report [3] that shed light on the need to improve the quality of care in nursing homes, much attention has been focused on achieving those improvements. Specific attention has been focused on improving the prevention and treatment of pressure ulcers [4,5]. This study of a large number of patients observed in a large number of nursing homes suggests that this attention has paid off. Although not necessarily representative of all nursing homes in the United States, the homes observed in this study represent a wide range of organizational structures, staffing patterns, and therapeutic orientations.

Applications for Clinical Practice

Pressure ulcers are common, associated with considerable morbidity, require the coordinated care efforts of multiple providers, and are usually preventable through the provision of appropriate interventions [6]. Berlowitz and colleagues have documented that attention to their prevention and treatment can yield positive results. Giving comparable attention to pressure ulcers across the continuum of care, from acute care to home care settings and nursing homes, can reduce the prevalence of ulcers and reduce their burden on patients and the health care system.

References

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