Factors to Consider in Decisions About Staffing in Rehabilitation Nursing Settings

An ARN Position Statement

Rationale

Staffing decisions involve a process of determining patient care needs and providing the staff skill mix that offers an effective number of nursing hours per patient day to deliver care. Rehabilitation nursing settings differ in patient population, the number of staff available, administrative/budgetary issues, admission criteria, levels of care, and workload. Variables to be considered when planning and assigning staff include:

- Patient Acuity
- Availability of specialized rehabilitation nursing professionals
- Availability of substitute/float staff that is appropriately oriented and cross-trained
- Accessibility of support systems
- Admissions
- Discharges
- Transfers
- Patients’ diagnoses
- Available technology
- Architecture and geography of the environment

Review and accrediting agencies generally expect staffing to be within an assessed level which is based on patients’ diagnoses and patient census. Rehabilitation nurse managers must be creative in meeting the needs of the nursing service areas by scheduling the available staff so that the days of the week and shifts correspond to the needs of the organization and the patient (e.g., bathing, managing bowel programs, and providing patient education activities). Maximum flexibility is desirable in terms of assignment of specialized rehabilitation nursing professionals to meet patient care needs effectively and in a fiscally sound manner.

Recommendations

Since there is not a standard system for determining nurse staffing ratios specific to rehabilitation nursing based on available research, rehabilitation nurse managers should:

1. Provide input into the selection of a written nurse staffing plan and validation of its applicability to their individual setting.
2. Participate in quality improvement endeavors that support staffing as it relates to positive patient outcomes, functional improvement, patient satisfaction, nurse satisfaction, and prevention of patient readmission.
References


Resources