



The Role of the Registered Nurse in Ambulatory Care Position Statement

Background

Health care is in the midst of unprecedented change. Improving the health of our nation will require reframing our health care system from one that emphasizes acute, episodic, interventional care to one that engages patients and providers together, in health promotion, disease prevention and early intervention. (Bodenheimer, Bauer, Syer, & Olayiwola, 2015). As a result, this enhancement of the Role of the Registered Nurse in Ambulatory Care position statement (AAACN, 2011) reflects current trends and changes to the RN role in response to the changing healthcare environment.

Across the continuum of care, ambulatory care registered nurses (RNs) work independently and collaboratively, partnering with patients, caregivers, providers, and other health care professionals in the design and provision of care in an ever expanding array of settings. The context of the ambulatory care environment is complex, rapidly changing, and often difficult to navigate. Care delivery design and implementation is directly influenced by social determinants, environmental factors, and access to care issues that impact the patient's ability to adhere to a prescribed plan of care and obtain needed services (Fraher, Spetz & Naylor, 2015; Lamb, 2014; Smolowitz, et. al., 2014).

Concurrently, health care is rapidly evolving to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse and aging population. At the same time health care costs are driving value-based reimbursement and innovative models of care. Ambulatory care RNs are well-prepared to assume an expanded role in the design and delivery of high quality care, defying traditional boundaries, and working in redefined interprofessional relationships, expanded community partnerships, and non-traditional health care settings.

The Importance of the RN in Ambulatory Care

- RNs provide high quality, evidence-based care across the life span to enhance patient safety, reduce adverse events, impact and improve patient satisfaction, support and promote optimal health status, track admissions and readmissions, and manage costs within and among continually expanding, diverse and complex populations. Therefore, registered nurses (RNs) are essential to the delivery of safe, high quality care and should not be replaced by less skilled, licensed or unlicensed members of the health care team.
- RNs are the team members best prepared to facilitate the functioning of interprofessional teams across the care continuum, coordinate care with patients and their care givers, and mitigate the growing complexity of transitions in care.
- RNs play a critical role in the delivery of telehealth services and virtual care. The development of the art and science of telehealth nursing practice has improved and expanded coordination of health care services, reduced patient risk, and contributed significantly to care management models.

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Creating a future that maximizes the role of RNs in an evolving health care environment will require sustained forward movement in nursing practice, education, research, and leadership, therefore:

- RNs must be recognized and supported as leaders in the transformation of healthcare in the ambulatory care setting. (IOM, 2010). They have expertise in the development, implementation, and sustainability of quality measures and clinical practice improvement.
- RNs must practice at the top of their license, education, and expertise to affect quality and cost through patient engagement, care coordination, enhanced teamwork, resource reduction, improved access, and quality and outcome improvement.
- Faculty and schools of nursing must design undergraduate and graduate curricula to prepare nurses for new roles in ambulatory care.

- Health facilities must implement ambulatory care nurse residencies for new nurses and experienced nurses new to ambulatory care practice.
- Government and insurance carriers must recognize the impact on cost reduction that an RN can provide under new reimbursement models which are linked to improved outcomes.
- RNs must lead, participate in, and support performance improvement activities designed to promote and enhance quality and safety, improve efficiency in care delivery, and evaluate impact on patient outcomes.
- Researchers must build the science of ambulatory care nursing by engaging in the development of new knowledge and innovation to build the evidence base needed to support quality practice.

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