



## Impact of Nursing Students In the Recovery of Psychiatric Patients

Joanne Lavin, RN, EdD  
Linda Paradiso, RN, MSN, CS

Many decry the lengthy inpatient hospital stays and high rate of recidivism for chronically ill psychiatric patients. But the literature has few proposals for ways to remedy this. Most of the literature focuses on continuing treatment programs post discharge to maintain and/or increase inpatient gains. While continuing treatment programs and day hospitals are valuable adjuncts in treating chronic psychiatric patients, we decided to look at how the inpatient hospitalization can enhance therapeutic treatment.

Specifically, we sought to determine what, if anything, is the impact of nursing students on selected variables in chronic psychiatric patients: Does care by nursing students enhance or impede inpatient gains?

In 52 patients, we examined the length of hospital stay, rate of readmission to the hospital for the same diagnosis, use of prn medications for anxiety and/or agitation, and length of time to achieve Status II of our privilege system, entitling them to special perks such as clothing or authorized day trips outside of the hospital. We completed a retrospective chart review of patients who had been assigned to a nursing student and then had a second admission within two years during a time when there were no students on the unit.

Since the nursing students are on the unit for 12 weeks from September to December and from March to May, this left 28 weeks in the year without students. The 27 patients studied were admitted and readmitted for the following diagnoses: 13 were diagnosed with

could be that the presence of the students increased the anxiety level of these patients. This would not necessarily result in an increased use of these prescribed medications, however.

A second positive correlation, at the 0.05 level, was a longer period before readmission following their assignment to a nursing student than before their assignment to a student. This certainly seems like a desired outcome in terms of managed care and the high cost of health-care today. Since another major focus of the students' interaction with their assigned patients is discharge planning, this was a hoped for finding. Students work with their patients on how to structure their time post hospitalization, the importance of continuing with therapy and medications, and more effective coping strategies to deal with stress.

There were no significant differences in the length of time to improve enough to



Linda Paradiso, RN (standing left), and her colleague Joanne Lavin, RN discovered that nursing students helped more than hindered patient recovery.

be classified Status II or in the length of inpatient stay with and without students.

The findings that the presence of nursing students potentially helps more than hinders the recovery of inpatients hospitalized for chronic psychiatric disorder is heartening. Nevertheless, we are aware of the limitations of this study due to the small number of subjects. We plan to expand the number of subjects in a pro-

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