

# Welcome To Patient Outcomes Research Conference

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Good Morning!

It is indeed a pleasure to welcome each of you to the conference on “Patient Outcomes Research: Examining the Effectiveness of Nursing Practice.” An exciting agenda and array of notable speakers will facilitate the critical examination of the state of the science regarding patient outcomes in three definitive areas; 1) identification of the existing body of knowledge concerning nursing interventions and patient outcomes, 2) articulation of the salient methods and measurement issues pertaining to nursing research evaluating patient outcomes, and 3) recommendations of future directions for nursing focused patient outcomes research.

Attention to patient outcome research in relationship to the interventions of health care providers has rapidly gained visibility and prominence during the last several years. Donabedian’s and Zimmerman’s early attention to structure, process and outcomes was only the forerunner of what was to become a very formalized field of practice and research. As Hegyvary has noted, concentrating the focus on patient outcomes is critical since it allows us to target our concerns and issues appropriately in perspective to the recipient of care, i.e., the client. In addition, the patient outcome focus challenges health care providers of all kinds to be accountable and responsible for the results of their therapeutic actions. It sensitizes health care professionals to the need to be systematic, deliberative, and carefully predictive of the results of our interventions.

The major emphasis of this conference is the critical examination of the state of the science and research base needed to guide the deliberative process of achieving particular patient outcomes. We are all aware that predicting and achieving specific outcomes resides in our ability to generate a body of accurate and reliable knowledge from which such systematic expectations can be defined. In considering the state of the science, several issues need to be examined.

- First, what is the theoretical state of the science in terms of patient outcomes from the nursing perspective? Is nursing science ready for a full-blown emphasis on patient outcomes research, i.e., explication of outcomes, interventions, and the explanatory relationships which allow us to understand the mechanisms through which certain expected outcomes can be predicted from deliberative therapeutic actions? Are there several preliminary research programs which need to be conducted first in relationship to identification of specific outcomes and particularly, in explication and refinement of the effective components of nursing interventions?
- Second, what are the particular outcomes which can be identified that are sensitive to nursing interventions and therapeutic actions? The traditional types of outcomes such as mortality, morbidity and disability, are criteria which can be used by all health care providers but do not provide

particularly informative data for understanding the outcomes of nursing interventions. More specific outcomes such as quality of life, functional status, broader symptom intensity and patient satisfaction may be more appropriate for capturing the results of major nursing interventions.

- Third, patient outcome research focused on medical effectiveness has primarily defined indicators which are sensitive to medical treatments in relation to particular disease processes. From a nursing perspective, particular clinical conditions need to be identified which are more specific to nursing's focus on prevention, health promotion, and symptom management and the amelioration of the effects of acute and chronic illnesses. We are all familiar with clinical conditions that are more central to our practice, such as skin integrity, pain, urinary incontinence, nausea and vomiting, nutritional deficits, confusion, restricted mobility, depression, fatigue, and illness related stress. It will be particularly important that we begin in our research programs to both define and refine the patient outcomes specific to interventions focused on such clinical conditions.
- Fourth, timing in relationship to understanding patient outcomes which result from particular nursing therapeutic actions is another major issue. Questions of just when to predict certain outcomes and be able to effectively evaluate them must be done in terms of whether the outcomes expected from particular interventions are short term in nature or whether the long term response is more critical such as with patient education and maintenance of behavioral change. Thus, understanding which outcomes are expected at specific points in time and generating the knowledge to predict the dynamic status of such outcomes, is of major concern.

Several methodological issues are also critical as you consider the status of patient outcome research in relationship to nursing effectiveness.

- The sensitive, valid and reliable measurement of patient outcomes is a critical area for study. New measures need to be developed operative indicators of nursing sensitive outcomes which reflect strong psychometric characteristics such as sensitivity, validity and reliability.
- Level of analysis issues are critical in patient outcome research since the result may reflect individual or aggregate entities. Methodological approaches for handling different levels of analysis and integrating these in theoretical context are important to develop.
- Large existing national data bases and nursing's ability to utilize these effectively poses a particularly difficult issue. Nursing elements are usually absent from large scale health care data bases. The paucity of nursing sensitive outcomes which can be identified with these data bases as well as the difficulties of extrapolating the few existing indicators in the data sets to measure the effectiveness of nursing interventions poses a particularly relevant challenge.

Attention to patient outcomes in practice and in our scientific programs of research, by nature, requires a multidisciplinary approach. Patient outcomes may reflect the interventions of numerous health care providers and must be considered within the context of multidisciplinary practice. Research programs in patient outcomes must also account for such a team endeavor. Collaboration will be a necessity as we seek with other health care scientists to understand the results of our actions, and to define more sensitively and precisely the expected outcomes of professional practice.

Your deliberations and shared collective wisdom in the next several days are of critical importance to the National Center for Nursing Research. The recommendations which you evolve by the end of this conference will provide one of the major bases from which program initiatives will be developed for the NCNR's patient outcomes research activities. The field of study is broad and diverse. We need your assistance in identifying the priority areas of study. If nursing is to systematically build the body of knowledge needed to guide the delineation of nursing interventions, in relation to nursing sensitive outcomes, we need to focus our endeavors to facilitate building depth in the science and providing stepping stones for the careful evolution and substantiation of knowledge in this field. As experts in this area of research, we look to you to provide the judgment needed to guide the development of a program in patient outcome research which will enhance a systematic examination of the effectiveness of nursing practice.

I envy you the challenge you face and the excitement of the endeavor.

Again welcome - we are looking forward to the outcomes of your collective wisdom.