National Center for Health Statistics: Nursing Home Care

The 2004 National Nursing Home Survey (NNHS) is the latest in a continuing series of surveys of United States nursing homes, their services, their staff, and their residents. The NNHS is the only periodic nationally representative survey of nursing home facilities. As the U.S. population ages and people are living longer with chronic diseases, the 2004 NNHS permits researchers, policy makers, and the nursing home industry to assess the adequacy of current nursing home care and future long-term care needs.

Lead Agency:

National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Agency Mission:
The mission of the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) is to provide statistical information that will guide actions and policies to improve the health of the American people. As the Nation's principal health statistics agency, NCHS leads the way with accurate, relevant, and timely data.

Principal Investigator:

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Partner Agencies:

United States Department of Veterans Affairs
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), United States Department of Health and Human Services

General Description:

The 2004 National Nursing Home Survey (NNHS) is the latest in a continuing series of nationally representative sample surveys of United States nursing homes, their services, their staff, and their residents. The 2004 NNHS was redesigned and expanded to collect many new data items. The 2004 NNHS will permit researchers, policy makers, and the nursing home industry to assess the adequacy of current nursing home care and future long-term care needs.

Data collected about the facilities include characteristics such as bed size, number of residents, ownership, top management training and tenure, staffing levels, turnover,

Medicare/Medicaid certification, geographic region, services provided and specialty programs offered, and charges. Data collected about the residents include information such as demographic characteristics, functional and cognitive status, continence, diagnoses, length of time since admission, services received, pain management, pressure ulcers, vaccinations, physical restraints, advance directives, falls, fractures, weight management, emergency department visits, hospitalizations, medications taken, and sources of payment. Data for the 2004 NNHS were obtained through in-person interviews with facility administrators and designated staff that used administrative records to answer questions about the facilities, staff, services and programs, along with interviews with staff familiar with the medical records to answer questions about the sampled residents.

All nursing homes that participated in the 2004 NNHS had at least three beds and were either certified by Medicare or Medicaid or had a State license to operate as a nursing home. A representative sample of nursing homes was selected from nursing home facilities in the United States. The 2004 survey sample consisted of about 1,500 facilities throughout the United States and up to 12 current residents from each facility.

The 2004 NNHS was administered using a computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) system and included a supplemental survey of nursing assistants employed by nursing homes, the National Nursing Assistant Survey (NNAS). The NNAS, sponsored by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (APSE), is the first-ever nationwide survey of nursing assistants, the group of health care workers who provide the majority of direct care (such as assistance with bathing or showering, dressing, getting in or out of bed or a chair, using the toilet, and eating) to the country's almost 1.5 million nursing home residents. A sample of up to eight nursing assistants was selected from about half of the nursing home sample at the time of the facility interview. The NNAS was administered after the nursing home visit, using a computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) system.

For the 2004 NNHS: 1,174 nursing facilities participated, representing 16,100 nursing homes and 1,492,200 residents nationally. For the NNAS, 3,017 nursing assistants participated, representing 702,500 nursing assistants working in U.S. nursing homes in 2004. The next NNHS is currently scheduled to be fielded in 2011.

Excellence: What makes this project exceptional?

The 2004 NNHS was significantly re-designed from previous years, including a four-fold increase in survey content, sample design modifications, and migrating from paper-and-pencil to CAPI data collection to facilitate data collection and improve data quality. The content enhancements include measures of quality of care, safety, staffing characteristics, outcomes of care, and palliative and end-of-life care. The sample design enhancements include increasing the sample size, enabling new subgroup analyses by selected diagnosis and race groups. The re-designed survey also enables linkage to other Federal data sets to enable access to and analysis of more clinical information.

The data from the 2004 NNHS are available on the Internet as public-use files. For the first time in 2004, the public-use files include the sample design variables that improve the accuracy of the results produced through the public-use files.

Significance: How is this research relevant to older persons, populations and/or an aging society?

The NNHS is the only periodic nationally representative survey of nursing home facilities. The public health impact of this project is to improve the public's health by monitoring care and outcomes of care provided to elderly residents in nursing home settings and to provide data for research that can assist health services researchers, federal stakeholders, policy analysts, and the long-term care industry. As the U.S. population ages, these data are especially important to explore the relationship between the services provided in these settings with patient safety, quality of care, and desired clinical outcomes.

Effectiveness: What is the impact and/or application of this research to older persons?

Today, nursing facilities continue to provide much needed long-term care services to a large segment of the country's disabled and elderly population. As the nation's total population of older adults grows and the average lifespan continues to increase, we need to continue to assess the availability and adequacy of these services. Data from the NNHS will have a direct impact on the health and well being of individuals residing in long-term care settings. The NNAS will provide extremely valuable information, which will guide future policy initiatives to increase the supply of nursing assistants in long-term care.

Innovativeness: Why is this research exciting or newsworthy?
Conducting the NNAS as part of the 2004 NNHS reduced duplication of data collected on nursing homes, reduced respondent burden, reduced costs, increased efficiency of data collection and dissemination, and increased the analytical potential for both the NNHS and the NNAS. The successful fielding of a health care worker survey, as a component of a health care provider survey, will serve as a model for future surveys of these types of workers including home health aides and aides working in other non-nursing home residential care. The NNAS will provide extremely valuable information, which will guide future policy initiatives to increase the supply of nursing assistants in long-term care. Data from the NNHS will have a direct impact on the health and well being of individuals residing in long-term care settings.