

Quality of Electronic Nursing Documentation in Australia Aged Care: Approaches to Evaluation

Ning Wang, Ping Yu, David Hailey

Health Informatics Research Laboratory, School of Information Systems and Technology, University of Wollongong, Australia

Abstract and Objective

Electronic nursing documentation (END) systems are increasingly deployed across aged care organizations in Australia and require evaluation to determine their effect on the quality of service. This presentation describes the development of approaches to the evaluation of END systems in aged care, and considers issues to be taken into account in the evaluation of service quality. Following the establishment of three evaluation goals, a nursing documentation audit instrument was constructed, using approaches derived from three information sources. The focus of the instrument was on documentation structure, format, process and content. The content validity of the instrument was tested by staff at an aged care facility and a high level of consensus was obtained. The audit instrument and related approaches will be used in a research project to evaluate the quality of electronic nursing documentation systems in aged care facilities.

Keywords:

Electronic nursing documentation, Evaluation, Quality, Nursing care, Patient outcomes, Aged care

Introduction

In health care organizations, increasing and maintaining the quality and coordination of care rely on effective communication between health caregivers. Nursing documentation, as the record of nursing care, functions primarily as a communication tool to facilitate continuity of nursing care and safety of patients.

The recognition that good information and communication are necessary for effective care practice has led to the application of electronic nursing documentation (END) systems across Australian aged care organizations. Evaluation of END systems and their use is needed to determine the effect of the systems on quality of care delivery.

Method

Relevant goals were set up to determine which appropriate approaches should be selected for the evaluation. It was decided that the effects of the END systems on the process and outcomes of patient care were of primary concern. In nursing context, these factors are interpreted as the quality of nursing documentation, the quality of care and patient outcomes.

Issues considered in developing evaluation approaches were:

- the evaluation should be nursing focused
- local nursing documentation practice should be taken into account
- relevant evaluation parameters must be selected

It was decided that indicators such as the quality of nursing documentation, the results of patient satisfaction surveys and selected clinical indicators would be assessed in the study to meet the evaluation goals.

To develop a nursing documentation audit instrument, three information sources were searched to derive quality criteria: a systematic literature review, relevant governmental and professional requirements and recommendations and aged care nursing documentation practice.

Results

Three categories of approaches and quality criteria were identified:

- **Documentation structure and format:** completeness, legibility, quantity of nursing documentation, objective or factual language etc.
- **Documentation process:** signature, date, designation, timeliness etc.
- **Documentation content:** comprehensiveness and appropriateness of care such as scope of care, frequencies of five phases of the nursing process and specific criteria for each step of the nursing process.

A nursing documentation audit instrument was constructed with 32 questions applying all types of identified criteria. A formal content validation process was conducted with a group of nursing managers at an aged care facility. A high level of consensus on the material included in the instrument was obtained. The instrument will be further tested in a pilot study to verify its feasibility, validity and reliability.

Conclusion

These approaches to evaluation of END systems have been developed with regard to previous work in this area and to local practice within aged care facilities. They will now be used in a study to determine the effect of END systems on the quality of aged care service delivery.

Address for correspondence

Email: nw57@uow.edu.au
Tel: 61-2-42218139