

## QUALITY AND COST-EFFECTIVE CARE: A NURSING SOLUTION

**Title** NURSES AS FIRST CALL

**The Issue** Access to health care has been a problem for some communities, particularly when there are difficulties recruiting and retaining physicians. Nurses in rural and remote settings have traditionally functioned to the full scope of nursing practice, but are not seen as being able to provide some essential health care services.

**A Solution** Develop a program that enables registered nurses in selected emergency settings to manage minor, uncomplicated health problems and injuries in which RNs would typically assess, treat and refer emergency room patients with specified diagnoses using evidence-based protocols.

**An Example** The RN First Call program was first implemented in British Columbia's Ashcroft and District General Hospital in 1996-97. The Ministry of Health expanded the program to 15 additional northern and rural hospitals in 1998. A list of clinical protocols permits registered nurses in northern and rural hospitals to provide timely and quality care within the full scope of nursing practice. In the pilot program, useful, acceptable and appropriate service was provided to between five per cent and 15 per cent of presenting emergency room patients. This figure is expected to grow if the number of protocols accessible to RN First Call is increased.

**Results** **PATIENT-RELATED:**

- The interests of the community are placed at the forefront as citizens receive both efficient and effective care.
- Patients can access an alternative health provider with different education and possibly a different perspective.

**PROVIDER-RELATED:**

- In some communities, reducing the number of emergency visits in which physicians are required to attend may assist with issues of physician recruitment and retention.
- Nurses enjoy practising to their full scope and benefit from necessary continuing education.

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**COST-RELATED:**

- Initial costs for the program were high. Cost-effectiveness is expected to increase if the program is expanded and the number of protocols and, therefore, patients seen is increased.
- Nurses' salaries do not increase with participation in the program.

*June 2000*

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**References:**

RNABC/BCNU: *RN First Call Program Evaluation Final Report*. February 4, 2000.

Telephone interview with Shirley Bengurt, Nurse Manager and Administrator at Ashcroft and District General Hospital.

Ashcroft nurses expand duties in bid to relieve doctor burnout. *The Vancouver Sun*. September 6, 1997.

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