



# Clinical collaboration where it's needed most

Evercare's nurse practitioners help coordinate care for its members, collaborating with physicians and nursing home staff.

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LONG-TERM CARE NEWS

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# Clinical Collaboration



Evercare NPs offer unsurpassed support – and expertise

There's a troubling trend in many of today's long-term care communities. While residents are typically entering the skilled nursing environment sicker and frailer than ever before, many facilities have an insufficient number of experienced, skilled nursing staff who can keep up with residents' increasingly complex care needs.

The correlation between quality of care and the availability of an adequate number of well-qualified nurses has been well-documented. Numerous studies have shown that residents receive better care and outcomes, are better able to age in place, and have a better quality of life when facilities are sufficiently staffed with skilled nursing staff.

Unfortunately, a nationwide nursing deficit, coupled with reimbursement cuts, is leading many operators to further reduce staffing levels in an effort to manage rising operational costs. No question, it's creating a slippery slope. According to a 2008 report released by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, more than 19,400 nursing vacancies exist in long-term care, and such shortages are increasing work demands and stress on existing nurses, lowering care quality, and prompting some nurses to leave the profession entirely. Further, an article published in the September/October 2005 issue of *Nursing Economics* showed that 93% of nurses surveyed experienced major challenges in detecting medical complications early and collaborating with other team members.

An increase in hospitalization is another key downfall of insufficient nursing oversight. A 2010 report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 8% of nursing home residents reviewed had an emergency department visit in the prior 90 days, and 40% of those visits were preventable.

"Some of these conditions [leading to ER visits and hospitalization], such as urinary tract infections, could be more appro-

priately treated in the nursing home,” the CDC’s National Center for Healthcare Statistics reported, citing research literature on the hospitalization of nursing home residents. The center further noted that more professional nursing staff in long-term care facilities could lead to prompt, appropriate diagnosis and more effective on-site treatment of residents’ complex medical needs.

### On-site NPs pay big dividends

While an adequate supply of nursing staff is undoubtedly beneficial, the advantages of having an on-site nurse practitioner available to care for residents, collaborate with physicians and support other care staff cannot be disputed.

“Patients come to nursing homes because they need nursing care. Who better to care for them than advanced practice nurses?” reasoned Mary Jane Henderson, MS, RN, GNP-BC, assistant professor and coordinator of the Gerontology Nurse Practitioner Specialty at the MGH Institute of Health Professions School of Nursing in Boston. Henderson, a past president of the National Conference of Gerontological Nurse Practitioners, currently serves on the education committee for the American College of Nurse Practitioners.

Not only do nurse practitioners play a primary role in improving resident care by supporting other care staff, Henderson said their eagerness to engage families and other healthcare professionals in patient care discussions, and their ability to bring current research and evidence-based care to the long-term care setting, makes them an even more invaluable asset.

Still, “most long-term care facilities do not employ NPs because of reimbursement issues for facility-employed NPs,” she acknowledged.

As a result, NPs are often employed by a private practice physician or a physician group under a fee-for-service care model, with their primary role being

to see residents on behalf of the physician. The downside of such a model is that those NPs are often scrambling to see as many residents as possible and, therefore, are more limited in their ability to provide more consistent, ongoing care and clinical support to facility staff, residents and family members.

Evercare is one of the nation’s largest health plan providers for Medicare Advantage plans that are specifically designed to meet the needs of people in nursing homes. At the core of that coverage is the Evercare Nurse Practitioner. The Nurse Practitioner serves members residing in skilled care centers

## The High Price of Hospitalization

Preventable hospitalizations are an economic burden to the American healthcare system. Worse, they place already vulnerable elderly residents at risk for a host of other medical complications, many of which are unrelated to the problem that led to admission.

The elderly commonly experience diminished muscle strength, bone density and pulmonary ventilation, as well as vasomotor instability, impaired cognitive and sensory function, and incontinence. Each of these conditions, among others, may thrust hospitalized seniors into a state of delirium and irreversible functional decline, according to the American College of Physicians and the American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry.

Potentially avoidable hospital visits most often result from injuries (such as falls), heart conditions, pneumonia, mental status changes, urinary tract infections, fever, metabolic disturbances, skin disease and breakdown, and gastrointestinal problems, statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show. Geriatricians and other healthcare experts generally agree that hospitalization of long-term care residents can best be avoided by comprehensive clinical monitoring and assessments.

This allows clinicians to detect changes in physical or cognitive function early, and identify risk factors that may cause illness, injury or further decline.

Unquestionably, adequate staffing levels play a critical role in a long-term care facility’s ability to proactively and consistently monitor residents and prevent avoidable hospitalization. Unfortunately, insufficient nurse staffing in the long-term care environment is common, and the limited availability of physicians to provide ongoing clinical assessments and treatment further exacerbates the problem.

The ongoing availability of a nurse practitioner in the long-term care environment has been shown to increase quality and cost-effectiveness of resident care, and reduce preventable hospitalizations. As advanced practice nurses, NPs are able to diagnose and treat a range of health problems; order, perform and interpret diagnostic tests; treat acute and chronic conditions; prescribe medications; and perform other treatments. Besides providing direct clinical care, nurse practitioners also promote wellness, address disease prevention, and deliver health education and counseling.

“The body of evidence regarding the quality of NP practice supports that NP care is at least equivalent to that of physician care,” the American Association of Nurse Practitioners states. While the majority of NPs who work in long-term care are not directly employed by a nursing facility, AANP notes that when nurse practitioners are regularly present in the long-term care facility, they are better able to positively affect resident care, outcomes and satisfaction, and reduce preventable hospital transfers.

# 88% Fully 88% of contracting nursing home directors would recommend Evercare to another facility

at no additional cost. Known as the Evercare Care Model, this personalized care approach ensures that Evercare members have a highly qualified clinician on their side to coordinate care, and collaborate and communicate with physicians, family members and nursing home staff from all disciplines.

The result is enhanced care response and coordination that reduces unnecessary hospitalizations, improves resident quality of life and drives greater resident, family and staff satisfaction.

“As an administrator, having a system that helps us better care for and treat our residents so they can stay in place is very important to me,” said David Tanck, administrator of Milwaukee-based Wisconsin Lutheran Care Center. Tanck’s 144-bed skilled nursing and rehabilitation services facility has contracted with Evercare for more than five years, and roughly half of its residents are Evercare members.

### A reliable resource

Having NPs on site benefits the Ever-

care member directly. The consistent presence of NPs has been shown to improve resident care in several ways. Most notably NPs help enhance treatment coordination and serve as dedicated resident advocates. As Evercare Clinical Services Manager Traci Miller pointed out, Evercare NPs are committed to advancing the care plan through prompt, ongoing communication and coordinated care planning. But they also provide indirect benefits to the facility as well. In fact, it’s their role as conduit and helper that makes them welcome at so many communities. As Henderson explained, NPs are a source of ongoing staff education and clinical support.

“Nurse practitioners are willing to teach by example and can set up formal educational classes for long-term care staff,” she noted. “NPs teach all day as questions about care arise or situations that warrant information-sharing present themselves.”

Miller added that “It’s our job to really be there every day to support the entire

team and help tie the whole care plan together.” This is accomplished by the NPs reaching out to all disciplines in the building, including staff from nursing and administration, social services, dietary, and therapy, among others.

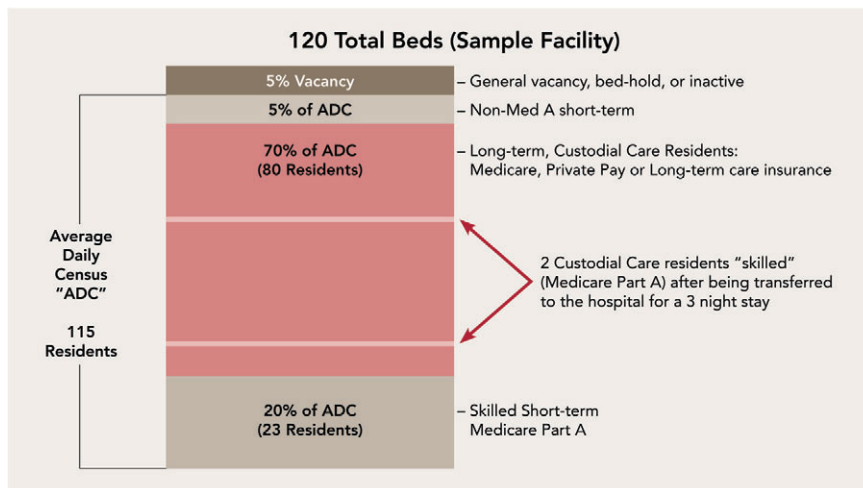
The indirect benefit that communities receive can make a huge difference, noted Gary Mohn, administrator of Alexian Village of Milwaukee. Roughly six years ago, the community became the first in Wisconsin to contract with Evercare and since then has consistently seen care improve across its entire long-term care resident population.

“There is so much information sharing that goes on. The knowledge of Evercare nurse practitioners is helpful for everyone – not just Evercare residents,” Mohn noted. “Evercare NPs are very much part of our team. Most of our staff don’t even know that she’s not on our payroll – she’s just like one of our own. If someone has a question about a non-Evercare resident, she will offer education, guidance and support. Evercare has a strong database on best practices, and the expertise and care management techniques – all of our residents and staff benefit from that.”

Lutheran Care Center also relies heavily on its Evercare NP in a consultative role. In the challenging and ever-changing long-term care environment, a collegial atmosphere that’s facilitated by NPs’ willingness to interject their knowledge and expertise for all staff and residents is critically important.

“There are always opportunities to go above and beyond – and Evercare does a very good job of that,” said Tanck. “Of course, any partnership will only work if the program behind it is good. The Evercare [Care Model] has been a terrific fit for us. We have had very good outcomes.”

## SNF Census Analysis





### Keeping quality care on-site

Decreased hospital transfers and admissions are one of the most positive outcomes associated with the Evercare Care Model. The model has reduced hospital admissions by 50%, while allowing residents to receive prompt, high-quality care on-site.

“One thing we in long-term care know very well is that hospitalization is typically not a good thing for older adults,” Mohn said. “We have residents who in the past may have been hospitalized but are now getting all the care they need right here because Evercare is identifying changes early and quickly addressing them.”

That proactive approach, along with the unique and challenging needs of the senior population, is what led nurse practitioner Joelle Frizzera to join Evercare several years ago.

One of the first to graduate from the prestigious Johns Hopkins hospital nurse practitioner program, Frizzera spent 15 years working in internal medicine before transitioning to long-term care.

“I saw firsthand what happened to the elderly population when they went into the hospital,” Frizzera recalls. “They usually required full care, but they often didn’t get the help they needed because nurses were so understaffed. Often, their [conditions] would worsen and their

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*Gary Mohn  
Administrator  
Alexian Village of  
Milwaukee*

quality of life was impacted.”

Vowing to take care of the elderly, Frizzera said she joined Evercare because their program revolved around peaceful care planning and making the very best care decisions that promotes quality of life.

“Also, I liked that Evercare’s NPs are salaried, as opposed to being paid under the fee-for-service model. With Evercare’s model, we are able to spend more time with residents and their families, as well as with staff – and even independent NPs.”

Another critical component of Evercare’s winning formula is its ability to provide ancillary support services, such as rehabilitation therapy. If a member’s condition becomes more acute, Evercare’s benefit design waives the three-day acute stay requirement for skilled nursing care and immediately steps in to provide therapy or other appropriate services.

“Evercare goes above and beyond what Medicare offers,” noted Miller. “That allows residents to receive the best care, right where they are.”

That continuity of care offers other notable rewards. As Mohn explained, physicians prefer a care model that allows residents to stay in their current environment, as opposed to being transferred to and from the hospital and other care settings. Beyond that, satisfaction ratings of residents and their families improve. Evercare garners member and family satisfaction ratings of more than 95%.

“With Evercare, we have seen everyone benefit – from our staff to physicians and, most importantly, our residents and their families,” Mohn noted.

“The bottom line is we are able to improve our communication, increase support and provide the very best care possible to our residents. And that’s the reason we’re in business.” ■

# 6 Reasons it Works

Focused, personalized care is what distinguishes Evercare, notes Ron Shumacher, M.D., Evercare's Chief Medical Officer

**1** Effective, ongoing communication is critically important and it's one of Evercare's core strengths. In addition to the need for communication among nursing home staff, physicians and other care professionals, family members and the resident, it's imperative to have clear communication with hospitals, dialysis centers, emergency departments, outpatient specialist offices, and more.

Our nurse practitioners and care managers lead that flow of information across the entire, interdisciplinary team. With this strong commitment to teamwork and communication, all parties are on the same page and there's a clear understanding of the care plan and an individual's unique preferences. That is what drives high-quality, resident-centric care.

**2** The Evercare model adds another level of care to the services delivered on-site. This is achieved by integrating medical, health and social support services to enhance residents' access to healthcare and improve their quality of life. In the long-term care environment, Evercare strengthens the delivery of preventative care through a collaborative approach that involves a nurse



"Evercare's proactive care model optimizes the health and well-being of each resident and promotes quality of life."

*Ron Shumacher, M.D.  
Chief Medical Officer  
Evercare*

practitioner, nursing facility staff and other members of the healthcare team. We partner with providers to bring more clinical care on-site to meet the facility's needs, as well as the unique needs of their residents. This allows for better, more timely care to be administered on-site, as opposed to having residents transferred to a hospital emergency department or other off-site setting. Any time you can provide more proactive treatment in the current care setting—and avoid unnecessary hospitalization—that will have a very real and direct impact on resident wellness, satisfaction and quality of life.

**3** Evercare prides itself on offering enhanced geriatrics expertise. Evercare expands and reinforces nurse practitioner training, which brings geriatric care principles to the forefront and allows nurse practitioners to better support the overall provider care team.

Our personalized, team-based approach helps providers deliver care to resident members. The primary care team includes the primary physician and either a nurse practitioner or physician assistant. This team works in tandem to help maintain the health and well being of all Evercare-enrolled

residents. Evercare's proactive, team-oriented approach delivers several important advantages:

- Teams get to personally know our enrollees, responsible parties and caregivers.
- We facilitate ongoing communication and coordination among all members of a resident's team.
- We assist in the development of a care plan and appropriate pharmacy management.
- We improve coordination of our enrollees' care across the care continuum.
- We work with Medicare and/or Medicaid to maximize coverage and benefits.

**4** In many cases, when a resident is transferred across different care settings, communication breaks down and fragmentation occurs. This fragmentation can lead to poor health outcomes that directly impact a resident's quality of life and may lead to significant costs for residents and providers. The Evercare model promotes more seamless care by coordinating services and promoting communication among health professionals across the care continuum.

Evercare enrollees benefit from our customized care programs that coordinate multiple services, facilitate better communication among physicians, institutions, patients and their families, and help ensure effective integration of treatments. This comprehensive, communicative approach puts everyone on the same page and ensures that key details of a resident's health and care plan don't slip through the cracks.

“We invest in wellness by focusing on prevention, ongoing monitoring and early intervention.”

**5** Evercare's incentives are aligned with those of our residents and provider partners. Medicare's traditional, fee-for-service payment system encourages resident transfers and hospitalization, which may further erode a resident's health and wellness. Many of these transfers and hospitalizations are unnecessary. The greatest flaw of the fee-for-service payment system is that it pays for sickness instead of wellness.

Evercare takes a different approach. We can facilitate services that are not available under traditional Medicare, such as access to Medicare's skilled nursing benefit without the usual hospital stay, transportation or dental benefits. Caring for residents in their current environment, whenever possible, is an approach that makes sense for both the resident and the provider.

**6** We invest in wellness by focusing on prevention, ongoing monitoring and early intervention. This proactive approach allows us to pinpoint and address changes in a resident's condition before these conditions develop into bigger, more difficult-to-treat problems.

Evercare's growth has been driven largely by our ability to meet the needs of individuals through a holistic care and wellness approach that emphasizes coordination of multiple treatments, health maintenance and preventative care. Our primary focus is maintaining resident wellness. Keeping residents healthier longer means they can avoid unnecessary trips to the hospital while enhancing quality of life and aging in place. ■

# Evercare<sup>®</sup>: A Revolutionary Care Model

Helping members with an on-site nurse practitioner



Evercare by UnitedHealthcare employs nurse practitioners who coordinate with nursing home staff. Our nurse practitioners offer personalized, care coordination services to nursing home residents, and enhanced communication with the entire care team. Members get more benefits and services with Evercare than with Original Medicare.

Thanks to our nurse practitioners, Evercare is a leader in providing care coordination to the people who need it most.

**For more information, call 877-431-0790**  
**EvercareNursingHomePlans.com**



The Evercare clinical model is a primary component of the Evercare health plans, Medicare Advantage plans offered by UnitedHealthcare Insurance Company or its affiliated corporate entities.

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