

THE CLINICAL NURSE SPECIALIST

Getting a Good Return on Healthcare Investment



THE ISSUE

Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNSs) contribute to three important aims for transforming the Canadian healthcare system – **better care** for individuals, **better health** for populations and **lower healthcare costs** through their ability to initiate, implement and support innovation to improve the delivery of nursing and healthcare services.

BACKGROUND

- CNSs are registered nurses with graduate nursing education and expertise in a clinical specialty.
- CNSs have advanced skills in analyzing and synthesizing evidence and facilitating its integration into care delivery that is specific for the patient/client.
- CNS interventions target individuals, families, communities, and providers to coordinate care, manage complex healthcare issues, and improve health.
- CNSs have existed in Canada for almost 50 years. They work collaboratively with interprofessional members of the healthcare team in hospitals, outpatient clinics, emergency departments, long-term care, community agencies, and homecare.

KEY MESSAGES

Better Care for Individuals

- CNSs improve patient/client access to care, especially for rural and vulnerable populations.
- CNSs ensure better access to supportive care through case management to assess

and manage risks and complications, plan and coordinate care, monitor and evaluate, and to advocate for health and social services that best meet patient/client needs.

- CNSs are case managers who collaborate with patients, families, physicians, and other health providers to bring a “team approach” to healthcare.
- Patients consistently report high levels of satisfaction with CNS care.
- CNSs promote excellence in practice and improve recruitment and retention by mentoring, educating, and supporting nurses at the front-line of care.
- CNSs improve the quality and safety of patient/client care by leading quality improvement initiatives, designing and implementing evidence-based policies and practices, and helping nurses and other healthcare professionals use best practice guidelines.

Better Health for Populations

- CNSs provide consultation and specialized care, especially for individuals needing complex disease management, palliative care or mental health care.
- CNS care for patients/clients with acute or chronic conditions contributes to reduced

mortality, better quality of life, lower complication rates, and improved physical, functional, and psychological well-being.

- Patients report greater involvement in their care, and understanding of their disease management and treatment when they receive care from a CNS.
- CNS care promotes patient self-care and healthy lifestyle behaviours that improve health promotion practices such as immunization rates, weight management, and participation in cancer screening.
- CNSs provide expert advice to nurses who are working with patients to improve self-management of chronic conditions.

Lower Costs

- CNSs reduce hospital admissions and visits to the emergency department, shorten hospital lengths of stay and decrease the use of unnecessary diagnostic tests, through improved case management of patients with high risk and complex conditions.
- CNSs provide comprehensive discharge planning and home follow-up in collaboration with interprofessional members of the healthcare team, which helps to reduce overall healthcare costs.

Investing in the CNS role makes good business sense.

For more information: www.apnnursingchair.mcmaster.ca

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Briefing Note References, 2012

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