

# Policy Update

## The benefits of Clinical Nurse Specialists in addressing the workforce crisis



London  
South Bank  
University

School of  
Health and  
Social Care



**London South Bank University (LSBU) has been utilising workforce modelling to explore the potential of Clinical Nurse Specialists in improving healthcare services.**

### **The importance of Clinical Nurse Specialists to the health economy**

Specialist nurses, who manage the care for patients with specific conditions, are experts in the field and have an understanding of the entire patient pathway. They are able to practice at an advanced level and manage complex care<sup>1</sup>, making the patient journey more efficient and a better experience for patients<sup>2</sup>.

Specialist nurses are usually able to run clinics and clinical services, order and interpret tests and investigations, conduct physical assessments and prescribe medications<sup>3 4</sup>. They can play a major role not only in delivering care but also in enabling patients to manage their own symptoms and helping to ensure they are only in hospital when they need to be<sup>5</sup>.

### **Clinical Nurse Specialists are cost effective**

Many studies have shown that specialist nurses are a good return on investment. They make care more efficient, stop unnecessary emergency admissions and prevent patients falling through gaps in the system. With an average salary of £35,000 per annum, they represent a good return in investment offering a high level of expertise to organisations<sup>6 7</sup>.

### **Clinical Nurse Specialists bring stability to services**

Given the current workforce challenges facing the NHS, this expert workforce brings stability to services. With an average tenure of 12 years in the English NHS<sup>7</sup>, specialist nurses ensure continuity of service and make a substantial contribution to patient safety. The care they provide means physician time can be used more productively<sup>8 9</sup>.



### **Case Study: Clinical Nurse Specialists in cancer care**

London South Bank University has recently worked with the University of Nottingham and the National Lung Cancer Audit to analyse more than 100,000 anonymised patient healthcare records and the work of more than 200 lung cancer nurse specialists across England.

This research has indicated that:

- Both radiotherapy and chemotherapy patients have a **lower risk of early death or emergency admission** after they have received an **assessment and**

## Conclusions

Healthcare organisations often view specialist nurses as an additional and potentially unnecessary cost, which has led to their provision being unequal across trusts in England.

However, LSBU's leading research demonstrates that there is a real tangible benefit of advanced practice nursing. For example, it is clear that receiving care from a lung cancer nurse specialist is fundamental to better outcomes for patients with their risk of dying decreasing. They also had a lower risk of being admitted to hospital unnecessarily, which in turn can lead to long-term cost effectiveness.

## About London South Bank University

LSBU excels in working with healthcare organisations to understand their workforce supply issues and model the demand on their services. We have wide-ranging experience of modelling cost effective workforce solutions that maintain quality and safe practice by understanding demand and releasing talent.

Led by Professor Alison Leary, Chair of Healthcare & Workforce Modelling, this modelling approach has also been applied to researching links between staffing levels, workload and patient outcomes.

If you have any questions on this briefing, or LSBU's School of Health and Social Care's wider workforce modelling work, please get in touch at: [corporate.affairs@lsbu.ac.uk](mailto:corporate.affairs@lsbu.ac.uk). The full study, entitled *Are working practices of lung cancer nurse specialists associated with variation in peoples' receipt of anticancer therapy?* can be viewed at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lungcan.2018.07.022>

**care from a lung cancer nurse specialist**, particularly if contact began at the time of diagnosis. This is in part due to proactive management of symptom issues.

However, despite these benefits, the research also found that assessment by lung cancer nurse specialists is not consistent across England:

- Patients referred by an emergency route were 57 per cent less likely to receive an assessment, compared to those referred by a GP.
- Those over the age of 75 were significantly less likely to be assessed by a lung cancer specialist nurse than those aged 65 and under.
- Patients were twice as likely to have been assessed in trusts where the majority of work is done by (more senior) band 8 nurses, (compared to bands 6 and 7).

- Patients with advanced cancer are less likely to have access to specialist services.
- Patients first seen in trusts with a high annual lung cancer caseload were less likely to be assessed compared with those in smaller trusts.

1 Leary A Anionwu E (2014) Modelling the Complex Activity of Sickle Cell and Thalassemia Specialist Nurses in England Clin Nurse Spec. 2014 Sep-Oct;28(5):277-82

2 NHS England. National Cancer Patient Experience Survey 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018. Available from Quality Health <http://www.ncpes.co.uk/> Accessed August 2018

3 Higgins A; Elliott N; Varley J; Tyrrell E; Downes C; Begley C; Normand C; Doherty C; Clarke M (2017) An evaluation of the role of the Epilepsy Specialist Nurse and the impact on care: SENsE study: Key findings. Dublin: Epilepsy Ireland. Accessed August 2018

4 Ndosi M, Lewis M, Hale C, et al (2013) The outcome and cost-effectiveness of nurse-led care in people with rheumatoid arthritis: a multicentre randomised controlled trial Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases Published Online First: 27 August 2013. doi: 10.1136/annrheumdis-2013-203403

5 Leary A Baxter J (2014) Impact of lung cancer clinical nurse specialists on emergency admissions. Br J Nurs. 2014 Sep 25-Oct 8;23(17):935-8.

6 Macmillan Cancer Support (2015) The Impact of Clinical Nurse Specialists <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/documents/aboutus/research/impactbriefs/clinicalnursespecialists2015new.pdf> accessed August 2018.

7 Data from the Cassandra Dataset—a curated dataset of the work of ~19,000 clinical nurse specialists at London South Bank University.

8 Leary A, Quinn D, Bowen A (2015) Impact of Proactive Case Management by Multiple Sclerosis Specialist Nurses on Use of Unscheduled Care and Emergency Presentation in Multiple Sclerosis: A Case Study. Int J MS Care. 2015 Jul-Aug;17(4):159-63

9 HSJ Workforce (2015) Time for some advanced thinking The Benefits of Specialist Nurses. An HSJ Supplement. 2015. (accessed August 2018).