



INAHTA Briefs

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Issue:	To determine appropriate staffing levels for veteran patients with spinal cord injury.
Title:	Physician and Nurse Staffing in Spinal Cord Injury Care: Relation to Outcomes
Agency:	VA Technology Assessment Program (11 T), Office of Patient Care Services, Room D4-142, 150 S. Huntington Avenue, Boston, MA 02130; Tel: 857-364-4469, Fax: 857-364-6587
Reference:	VA Technology Assessment Program Short Report, Number 7, February, 2003. www.va.gov/vatap
Aim:	To determine the number of medical staff needed to provide the best medical care for patients with spinal cord injury. In particular, VA was interested in the number of nurses needed in the hospital and the number of nurses and physicians needed in outpatient clinics. The number of staff needed was to be determined by outcomes important to clinicians and patients with spinal cord injury.
Conclusions and results:	The review identified several studies: only one was directly relevant to this topic; five studies addressed care of spinal cord injury patients, but not in outpatient or extended care settings. The VHA found good studies on nursing in general medical-surgical hospitals that patients recover better in hospitals that focus on nursing and maintain good relations between nurses and physicians. The VHA did not find evidence on the numbers of nurses and physicians needed in outpatient clinics that treat patients with spinal cord injury. In addition, a tool for measuring outcomes in patients with spinal cord injury was not identified.
Recommendations:	Patients in general, and possibly also those with spinal cord injuries, recover better in hospitals that focus on nursing and maintain good relations between nurses and physicians. Additional information is needed to determine the numbers of nurses and physicians needed in outpatient clinics to treat patients with spinal cord injury.
Methods:	The Technology Assessment Program (TAP) searched the MEDLINE and EMBASE from 1966 through December 2001, health technology assessment database and special reports (Booz-Allen Hamilton, 2000). References provided by the VHA's Strategic Healthcare Group were included. Over 800 references were reviewed on spinal cord injuries or spinal cord trauma.
Further research/reviews required:	Additional research is needed to determine the staffing needs of nurses and physicians in outpatient clinics to treat patients with spinal cord injury and identify a reliable outcome measure for patients with spinal cord injury.
Written by:	Karen Flynn, DDS, MS