

# Nursing Economics®

The  
Journal for Healthcare Leaders

A Jannetti Publications, Inc. Journal

MARCH/APRIL 2024

## What Is the Return on Investment for Patient Advocacy and Care Management?

The quality of the nurse-patient relationship is the key driver of high engagement between a patient and their health care encounter. Ways to increase nursing's return on investment, such as high engagement, are explored through the success of a nurse-owned, nurse-run company.

By Betty Long, Guardian Nurses Healthcare Advocates

If you ask the big companies that provide patient advocacy and care management services by telephone, they might give you a vague answer about value, but they can't give you hard data with a verified percentage return on investment (ROI). However, if you ask Guardian Nurses Healthcare Advocates, which provides high-touch patient advocacy and care management by registered nurses (RNs) who show up in person, you will get a real answer: from \$2 to \$7 for every \$1 invested.

Guardian Nurses is a nurse-owned, nurse-run company that was recognized for innovation with a 2023 American Academy of Nursing Edge Runners award. One of many innovations that make the company's Mobile Care Coordinator® (MCC) program unique is the literal mobilization of nurses in branded vehicles to visit patients when and where help is needed: in a hospital, a doctor's office, or at home.

Another innovation is the pricing model. Guardian Nurses bases the client's investment on health data the client provides (i.e., among all those covered by the health plan, how many were hospitalized in the last year, how many of those for an acute versus chronic condition). These data indicate how many mobile nurses will be needed to address actual usage.

With a telephonic provider, the client's investment is calculated as a flat fee per member per month. If the client business or union has 52,000 members covered by its health care plan, they all factor into the price, even if a small percentage ever engages by telephone with the advocate/care manager.

### Patient Engagement Matters

At this juncture, we must define the word engage. With a telephonic provider, people are said to be engaged if they respond to the call (answer or call back) and request help. In the Guardian Nurses MCC program, the definition of an engaged person is one who agrees to follow the individualized care plan the nurse is managing and accepts responsibility for taking the prescribed steps. This is a big difference.

Recent stats reported to a union client by one large telephonic provider (name withheld) were as follows. The union has 4,000 individuals (members and their covered dependents) covered by its health care plan. Over a one-year period, the telephonic provider made 304 outreach calls. From those, 105 individuals responded, and 24 (8%) engaged. That engagement rate is close to the typical 10% engagement rate from telephonic patient outreach. The rate rarely goes above 30%.

Compare that with the 45% to 95% MCC program engagement rate documented by Guardian Nurses. Why are we getting so deep into engagement when the topic is ROI? One of two key reasons for the MCC program's high ROI is high patient engagement. Individuals form a real relationship with a nurse who shows up at their bedside when they are admitted to a hospital as opposed to calling after they have been discharged to ask how they are doing. The quality of the nurse-patient relationship is the key driver of high engagement.



# Nursing Economics®

The  
Journal for Healthcare Leaders

*A Jannetti Publications, Inc. Journal*

MARCH/APRIL 2024

## Improved Outcomes Lower Costs

The other key reason for the MCC program's high ROI is improved patient outcomes. With the caring concern typical of nurses and the clinical knowledge that comes from 15-plus years of experience, MCC nurse advocates drive timely, top-quality care that results in better outcomes.

Savings for clients who pay health care bills for these patients accrue from fewer unnecessary or inappropriate procedures, fewer hospital admissions caused by unmanaged treatable conditions, fewer readmissions after discharge, and more. The fact that better patient outcomes equals money saved for payors is the ultimate win win.

As the nurse who founded the nurse-centric company delivering on that win-win every day, I challenge health care systems to defend budgets that categorize nursing as a cost center, along with room and board. That longstanding practice grossly undervalues nursing's impact on health care costs and quality outcomes. One look at Guardian Nurses' outcomes data proves that when you give nurses a strong voice in care management, nursing becomes a value driver - reducing costs.

MCC nurses and the full team of nurses backing them up get all the credit for both key reasons why the MCC program is an economic success: high patient engagement and improved patient outcomes. Hard data proving the economic success - a verified ROI of \$2 to \$7 for every \$1 spent - are available because Guardian Nurses commissioned independent ROI

analyses involving two large clients, one in 2022 and one in 2023. The studies were conducted by experts at Open Health, LLC, a collaboration of management and research professionals committed to improving public health.

The first analysis involved Schools Health Insurance Fund (SHIF), which covers 52,500 lives in Southern New Jersey. The report showed a blended ROI for case management of acute and complex/chronic patients of 3.4 to 1. Separately, the acute ROI was 3 to 1, while the complex/ chronic ROI was 4 to 1.

The second analysis, using the same methodology, involved Teamsters Health & Welfare Fund of Philadelphia & Vicinity, which covers 16,733 lives. The Teamsters report showed a 2.4 to 1 ROI for acute patients and a 7.5 to 1 ROI for patients undergoing diabetes management.

The full Open Health reports can be viewed at [www.guardiannurses.com/roi-reports](http://www.guardiannurses.com/roi-reports).

### **Betty Long, MHA, RN**

*Founder and President/CEO*

Guardian Nurses Healthcare Advocates  
Flourtown, PA

