



Factors influencing the delivery of health care:

A. Cost:

The very existence of the health care system depends on financial issues. Cost has been a driving force for change in the health care system as evidenced by the strength and numbers of managed care plans, increased use of outpatient treatment, and shortened hospital stays. These market forces (to maximize profits by minimizing costs) are dominating the current changes in the health care system.

Factors increase the cost of health care:

1. An over supply of specialized providers,
2. A surplus of hospital beds,
3. The passive role assumed by most consumers,
4. Unbalanced financing of services.
5. The aging of the population,
6. The increased number of people with chronic illnesses,
7. The increase in health-related lawsuits that has resulted in the unnecessary use of services, and
8. Advanced technology that has allowed more people to survive disabling illnesses.

B. Access:

Access to health care services has a serious impact on the functioning of the health care system. As a result of the cost, health care for many people is crisis-oriented and fragmented. **Poverty** often adversely affects an individual's access to health care services. For example, limited transportation (lack of an automobile or funding for public transit) interferes with the ability to travel to health care facilities. These people are neither poor nor old, but middle-class **unemployed** or those in jobs without adequate health care benefits.

In addition to poverty and unemployment, other factors impede a person's ability to obtain insurance. Other variables affecting access are the **increase in the number of women employed outside the home and the number of single-parent families**. These factors impair access to health care services because it is often difficult for parents to take time off from work to transport children to health care providers.

C. Quality: Safety and quality are frequently compromised by inappropriate substitution of unqualified personnel for registered nurses in direct care of clients.

Cross-training of staff, increased use of unlicensed personnel, and reductions in full-time positions for nurses are affecting the type of care



delivered in hospitals. Any movement toward reform must focus on providing quality nursing care to all consumers.

Challenges within the health care system:

The major challenges facing the health care delivery system include:

- 1. The public's disappointment with providers:** (the positive perception of nurses will be important as reform initiatives are established).

Positive Perception of Nurses: Several studies verify the public's trust in nurses. The public sees nurses as part of the solution, not the problem, and believes that, if nurses were allowed to use their skills, they would significantly enhance quality and reduce cost.

- 2. Loss of control over health care decisions.**

- 3. Decreased use of hospitals:**

In the early 20th century, hospitals focused on providing care to those who had no caregivers in the family or community. The focus of these early institutions was care not cure. The focus of hospitals changed in the mid-1940s as a result of technologic changes which provided funding for renovation and construction of hospitals. An unanticipated outcome of this act was a substantial oversupply of hospital beds. Health care costs escalated with the need to keep the hospital beds occupied. From 1945 to 1982, the demand for hospital beds steadily increased. After 1982, a steady decline in the number of hospital admissions and the length of stay occurred. Hospitals have fewer clients today because of the trend toward rapid discharge and more procedures being performed in outpatient settings. The clients who are hospitalized require more nursing care because of the greater complexity of needs and severity of illness.

- 4. The impact on quality of care, changing practice settings, ethical issues, and vulnerable populations.**

Changing Practice Settings:

Most nurses currently practice in hospitals and will continue to do so in the future. However, there is an ever-increasing need for nurses in different areas of practice. Social and political changes are affecting nurses by creating the need for expanded services and settings. Because of these changes, demand for nursing care fluctuates. For example, nursing employment outside the hospital continues to increase rapidly. Health care expenditures for home care are rapidly increasing.

More nurses will be needed in the future due to:

- 1.** The growing elderly population will require more health care services.
- 2.** The number of people admitted to nursing homes is steadily growing.
- 3.** The number of homeless individuals, who are most often denied access to health care, is increasing.



Vulnerable Populations:

Meeting the health care needs of underserved populations is especially challenging. Groups that may be unable to gain access to health care services include:

- Children,
- The elderly,
- People with AIDS,
- The homeless, and others living in poverty.

Preventive health care should be available to children of all ages, with an emphasis on early immunization. In addition, maternal-child health. The most rapid spread of the disease is occurring among women, children, and intravenous drug users and their sexual partners.

Public Health:

Public health includes services such as immunizations, prenatal care, environmental concerns, and analysis of the widespread disease patterns in a community.

Current public health problems include:

1. Increase of sexually transmitted diseases (e.g., syphilis and gonorrhea).
2. Appearance of new fatal diseases (e.g., AIDS).
3. Emergence of drug-resistant strains of tuberculosis.
4. Under immunization of infants and children.
5. Prevalence of overweight and inadequately nourished young people.
6. Presence of toxic environmental conditions.