



NURSES CARING FOR CHILDREN WITH ASTHMA

In outpatient clinics, nurse-led follow-up of children with asthma is as effective as follow-up by a pediatrician, but the cost is 17.5 per cent lower when care is provided by nurses.

Background

International guidelines for treating childhood asthma recommend comprehensive patient education and regular follow-up to ensure that drugs are being used correctly. Adequate asthma control reduces the need for hospital admissions, costly visits to the emergency department and use of other health-care resources. Previous work has shown that nurse-led follow-up of children with asthma is as effective as follow-up by a pediatrician, in terms of clinical outcomes and quality of life.¹ Kamps et al. (2004)² have now demonstrated the cost benefits of nurse-managed outpatient clinics in the Netherlands. In this study, costs were lower when nurses, rather than physicians, provided follow-up care (over a one-year period) in an outpatient clinic, even though the mean total time spent with patients was about 40 per cent greater for nurse-led follow-up. Specifically, the cost of outpatient follow-up led by nurses was 17.5 per cent lower, and the overall costs to the health-care system were 7.2 per cent lower.

Bottom Line

- Nurse-led outpatient care of children with asthma yields the same health results as follow-up care provided by a physician but at a lower cost.
- Providing nurse-led follow-up in outpatient clinics would free up pediatricians' time to see more new patients, which would shorten wait-lists.
- During follow-up appointments with children, nurses spend more time than do pediatricians providing patient education, a key part of disease management.

¹ Kamps, A. W. A., Brand, P. L. P., Kimpen, J. L. L., Maillé, A. R., Overgoor-van de Groes, A. W., van Helsdingen-Peek, L. C. J. A. M., et al. (2003). Outpatient management of childhood asthma by paediatrician or asthma nurse: randomized controlled study with one year follow-up. *Thorax*, 58, 68-73.

² Kamps, A. W. A., Roorda, R. J., Kimpen, J. L. L., Overgoor-van de Groes, A. W., van Helsdingen-Peek, L. C. J. A. M., & Brand, P. L. P. (2004). Impact of nurse-led outpatient management of children with asthma on healthcare resource utilisation and costs. *European Respiratory Journal*, 23, 304-309.