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How Much Do Patients Save? Estimating the Financial Benefits of Home-Based Care by Public Health Nurses in Sri Lanka

Senadheera ASPL^{1,2}, Gunawardhana DC³, Gunarathna SP⁴, Priyanthi WN², Warnasekara YPJN¹

¹Department of Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine and Allied Sciences, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka

²Department of Nursing, Faculty of Health Sciences, The Open University of Sri Lanka

³Department of Mathematical Sciences, Faculty of Applied Sciences, South Eastern University of Sri Lanka

⁴International Vaccine Institute, Seoul, South Korea

Background: Globally, public health nurses (PHNs) are recognised for their pivotal role in reducing healthcare costs by delivering home-based care. However, evidence on the extent to which Sri Lankan PHNs contribute to patient cost savings through such services remains scarce.

Objective: This study aimed to examine patient cost savings resulting from home-based care provided by PHNs in Rathnapura District, Sri Lanka.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among a random sample of patients (>18 years) from 7 PHN areas in Rathnapura District who had received home-based care during December 2024. Data were collected using a pre-tested, interviewer-administered questionnaire and analysed descriptively.

Results: A total of 688 home visits were conducted for 128 patients; 54.7% (n=70) were female, 46.9% (n=60) widowed, 89.1% (n=114) unemployed. The median monthly family income was LKR:38,000.00 (IQR:23,000.00-55,000.00), with 46.9% receiving government subsidies. The most common PHN activities were family counselling (556), wound care (390), measuring blood pressure (180), blood sugar testing (138), urinary catheterisation (134), pain management (62), and NG-tube insertion (35). If PHN services were not available, most patients (n=106, 82.8%) preferred to use public healthcare facilities and had to travel a median distance of 4km (IQR:1.5-12), spending estimated median transport cost per hospital visit of LKR:1,350.00 (IQR:500.00-3,000.00), food cost LKR:500.00 (IQR:0-1,000.00), and salary losses LKR:1,500.00 (IQR:0-3,000.00). Further, the saved total median non-medical cost per patient per visit was LKR:3,500.00 (IQR:1,800.00-7,175.00), per month was LKR:8,000.00 (IQR:3,387.00-27,575.00). The saved total median non-medical cost by a PHN per month was LKR:572,100.00 (IQR:181,800.00-718,200.00). Moreover, only 7.8% (n=10) wished to obtain home-based care from a private practitioner if PHN services were not available. This saved LKR:43,750.00 (IQR:26,000.00-73,750.00) in total median out-of-pocket expenditure per patient per month.

Conclusion: PHNs substantially reduce patients' healthcare costs by delivering home-based services. Expanding coverage and actively promoting PHN services could enhance access and further strengthen community-based care.

Keywords: Home-based Care, Patients' Cost Savings, Public Health Nurse, Sri Lanka