

Health Care Systems: Trends

THERE ARE eight significant health care system trends. Knowledge of their existence is not enough for health care workers. It is important to realize the significance of the trends as they reveal the basis and the relevance of the trends.



Objective:



Identify the trends in health care systems that are significant to health care workers, and explain the significance of each trend.

Key Terms:



alternative therapies
chi
complementary
therapies
cost containment

diagnosis related groups
(DRGs)
dosha
geriatric care
holistic health care
home health care

national health care
plan
Omnibus Budget
Reconciliation Act
telemedicine
wellness

Health Care: System Trends

The health care industry has changed significantly over several decades. You may have personally noticed some ways in which it has changed. Why would health care workers need to understand this changing environment? Why does the health care environment change so rapidly?

SIGNIFICANT TRENDS IN HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS FOR CARE WORKERS

Several trends in health care systems include the following:

- ◆ **Cost containment** is controlling the rising cost of health care and achieving the maximum benefit for every dollar spent.

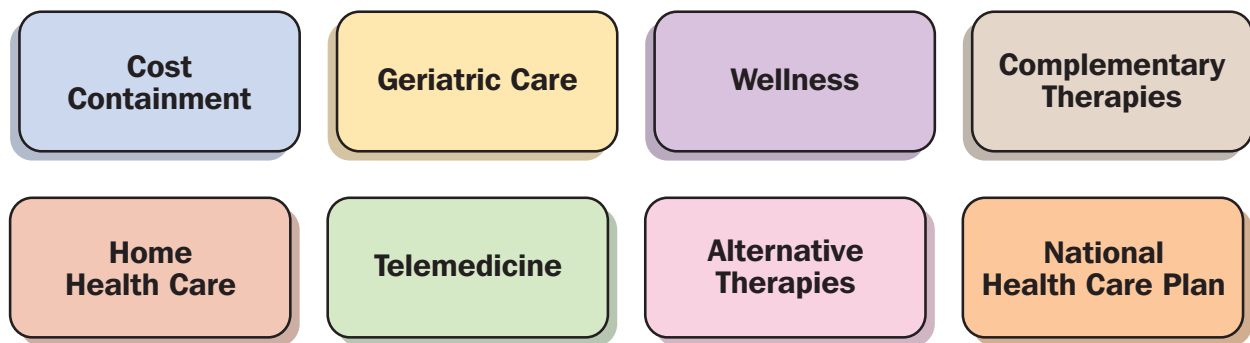


FIGURE 1. There are currently eight significant trends in health care systems.

- ◆ **Home health care** is health care services provided in the home.
- ◆ **Geriatric care** is care for the elderly.
- ◆ **Telemedicine** is the use of video, audio, and computer systems to provide medical or health care services.
- ◆ **Wellness** is the state of being in optimum health with a balanced relationship between physical, mental, and social health.
- ◆ Alternative and complementary methods of health care are on the rise. **Alternative therapies** are methods of treatment used in place of biomedical or “Western” systems of health care.
- ◆ **Complementary therapies** are methods of treatment used in conjunction with conventional medical therapies.
- ◆ A **national health care plan** is a plan to cover all health care expenses through a federal medical plan to pay for health care by levying taxes to pay for those services.

SIGNIFICANCE OF EACH TREND FOR HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Knowledge of trends is not enough. Health care workers need to realize the significance of the trends regarding the basis and the relevance.

Cost Containment

Several reasons relate to cost containment as a current significant trend. There are rising health care costs due to:

- ◆ Technological advances, such as major organ transplants (i.e., heart, lungs, liver, and kidneys) and diagnostic technology
- ◆ An aging U.S. population (people generally living longer and consequently often enduring chronic diseases)
- ◆ Increased litigation and rising malpractice insurance; increases in diagnostic tests due in part to the practice of defensive medicine

Methods for cost containment are:

- ◆ **Diagnosis related groups (DRGs)** are items grouped into one payment group, and a limit is placed on the cost of care for these groups. This is managed through Medicare and Medicaid insurance plans and other insurances choosing this payment type. DRGs encourage health care providers to provide care at below the cost of reimbursement to make a profit.
- ◆ A combination of services involves agencies collaborating to offer shared services and to share expenses across a large group of participants.
- ◆ Outpatient services offer patients care without admittance to hospitals or other care facilities. Service costs are less on an outpatient basis.
- ◆ Mass or bulk purchasing involves buying equipment or supplies in larger quantities at reduced prices.
- ◆ Early intervention and preventive services involve providing care before acute or chronic illness develops. Prevention is less costly than treatment of a disease.
- ◆ Energy conservation is monitoring the use of energy to control costs and to conserve resources (e.g., gas, electricity, and water).

Home Health Care

Home health care has experienced growth because diagnosis related groups (DRGs) and short hospital stays have increased requests for home health care. Services include nursing care, physical and occupational therapy, social services, nutritional and food services, and respiratory therapy.

Geriatric Care

Growth in geriatric care is related to advances in medicine and to patients living longer, so the demand for these services is increasing. Services include adult day care centers, retirement communities, assisted- or independent-living facilities, long-term care facilities, and other similar organizations that are experiencing an increased demand for services. Regulations, such as the **Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act**, establish training and competency evaluation programs in addition to continuing education for nursing and geriatric assistants. OBRA includes a compliance requirement with patient/resident rights and ensures that those rights are observed and enforced.

Telemedicine

With the application of telemedicine, interactive services between health care providers and different locations are now possible. Surgeons can use robotic equipment to perform surgery from a distance. In addition, telemedicine can be used in the monitoring of diagnostic tests (e.g., blood sugar levels, oxygen levels, and pacemaker readings). Finally, telemedicine allows for access to specialists in distant locations.

Wellness Factors

There are five wellness factor areas: physical, emotional, social, mental and intellectual, and spiritual.

- ◆ Physical wellness is promoted by a balanced diet, regular exercise, routine physical exams, and regular dental and vision exams in addition to the avoidance of alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, drugs, environmental contaminants, and risky sexual behavior.
- ◆ Emotional wellness is promoted by understanding personal feelings and expressing them appropriately, accepting limitations, adjusting to change, coping with stress, enjoying life, and maintaining an optimistic outlook.
- ◆ Social wellness is promoted by showing concern, fairness, affection, tolerance, and respect for others; communicating and interacting well with others; sharing ideas and thoughts; and practicing honesty and loyalty.
- ◆ Mental and intellectual wellness is promoted by being creative, logical, curious, and open-minded; using common sense; learning continually; questioning and evaluating information and situations; learning from life experiences; and using flexibility and creativity to solve problems.
- ◆ Spiritual wellness is promoted by using values, ethics, and morals to find meaning, direction, and purpose to life. This type of wellness may include a belief in a higher authority and the observation of religious practices.

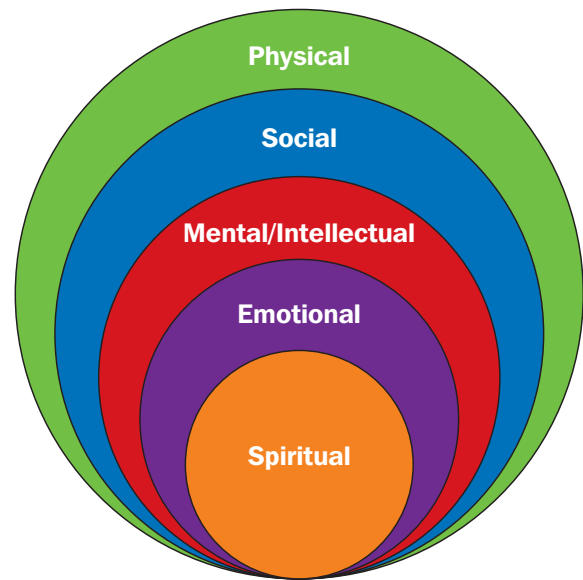


FIGURE 2. Wellness is a significant trend in health care. The five wellness factor areas are physical, social, mental/intellectual, emotional, and spiritual.

Holistic Health Care

Holistic health care is care that promotes physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual wellness by treating the whole body, mind, and spirit.

Alternative and Complementary Methods of Health Care

There are several types of alternative and complementary practitioners, including:

- ◆ Ayurvedic practitioners use the ancient philosophy of ayurveda (developed in India) to determine a person's predominant **dosha** (body type) and then to prescribe diet, herbal treatment, exercise, yoga, massage, minerals, and living practices to restore and maintain harmony in the body.



FURTHER EXPLORATION...

ONLINE CONNECTION: Health Care Cost Containment

The National Conference of State Legislatures has an excellent website on the topic of health care cost containment and efficiency improvements. This page is located at <http://www.ncsl.org/default.aspx?tabid=19200>. First, review what the National Conference of State Legislatures mission is and for whom they provide these briefs.

Then delve into the link listed above. Select one of the many briefs listed and read it carefully. On a separate sheet, take careful notes. Organize your notes. Then do additional research, if necessary. Develop a two-page paper. In this paper, articulate the topic of the brief, how that singular issue fits into the larger picture of cost containment, what the proposed solutions are, the challenges, and what it would take to improve the situation. Present your paper to the class.

- ◆ Chinese medicine practitioners use an ancient holistic-based healing practice based on the belief that life energy (**chi**) flows through every living person.
- ◆ Chiropractors believe the brain sends vital energy to all body parts through nerves in the spinal cord. Misalignment of the spinal cord results in disease and pain.
- ◆ Homeopaths believe in the ability of the body to heal itself through the action of the immune system.
- ◆ Hypnotists help individuals obtain a trance-like state with the belief that those people will be receptive to verbal suggestions and will be able to make a desired behavior change.
- ◆ Naturopaths use only natural therapies (e.g., fasting, special diets, lifestyle changes, and supportive approaches) to promote healing.

National Health Care Plan

You may have heard about this trend in the media. A national health care plan would be organized by the federal government. Taxes would pay for all individuals to have access to health care services. However, there are some problems or concerns associated with this type of plan. For example, it is expensive to create the system, freedom of choice regarding providers is lost, and the establishment of regulations to create such a system is complicated and time-consuming.

Summary:



Several current trends exist in the health care systems. Cost containment, for instance, involves controlling the rising cost of health care and achieving the maximum benefit for every dollar spent. Other trends pertain to home health care, geriatric care, telemedicine, wellness, alternative and complementary methods, and the creation of a national health care plan.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. Explain the trend of home health care and why it is significant.
2. Explain the trend of telemedicine and why it is significant.
3. Explain the trend of cost containment and why it is significant.
4. Explain the concept of a national health care plan.
5. Explain the five wellness factors and how they interrelate to one another.

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Which one of the trends mentioned in this E-unit is the most interesting to you and why? Complete some additional research on this topic. With the help of the career resource center, locate a local expert on this topic and interview him or her.

Web Links:



National Conference of State Legislatures

<http://www.ncsl.org/Default.aspx?TabID=305&tabs=1027,77,544#1027>

National Association for Home Care and Hospice

<http://www.nahc.org/>

American Telemedicine Association

<http://www.americantelemed.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3333>

National Center for Alternative Complementary and Alternative Medicine

<http://nccam.nih.gov/>