

The cost of malnutrition: Study shows nutrition program could save hospitals up to \$3,800 per patient

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Making sure people stay nourished in the hospital has shown to help patients recover, and real-world evidence confirms its cost benefits too. The research, published in [American Health & Drug Benefits journal](#) and supported by Abbott, found that when Advocate Health Care implemented a nutrition care program at four of its Chicago area hospitals, it showed more than \$4.8 million in cost savings due to shorter hospital stays and lower readmission rates.³

Addressing malnutrition is a growing concern, as 1 in 3 people enter the [hospital](#) malnourished or at risk of malnutrition.¹⁻² Decades of research prove that when patients are poorly nourished, it can impact their recovery, [including](#) higher risk of complications (such as pressure ulcers, infections and falls) and more frequent readmissions. Studies also show that poor nutrition can cause increased costs of care and longer hospital stays-with the average hospital stay costing nearly \$2,000 per day.⁴ As a result, hospitals and health care systems, such as Advocate Health Care, are looking at the value of nutrition to improve care and help patients get back to living a healthier life.

Starting in 2014, Advocate Health Care implemented two models of a nutrition care program for patients at-risk of malnutrition, and the results from this [study](#) published in December 2016, found that doing so reduced 30-day readmission rates by 27 percent and the average hospital stay by nearly two days.⁵ To evaluate the cost-savings of this program,

researchers used a novel, web-based budget impact model to assess the potential cost savings from the avoided readmissions and reduced time in hospital. Compared to the hospitals' previous readmission rates and patients' average length of stay, researchers found that optimizing nutrition care in the four hospitals resulted in roughly \$3,800 [cost savings](#) per patient treated for malnutrition.

"Value-based care means looking comprehensively at patient care to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement," said Lee Sacks, MD, executive vice president and chief medical officer of Advocate Health Care. "The study's findings demonstrate that modest changes in the way we care for patients, such as ensuring patients are nourished during their hospital stay, can have a big impact in reducing costs and improving health outcomes."

"This research confirms that implementing nutrition-focused quality improvement programs, like the ones at Advocate Health Care, can help [patients](#) recover from their hospitalization faster while also removing some of the burden of financial pressures placed on health systems today," said Suela Sulo, PhD, a [health](#) outcomes researcher at Abbott and lead author of the cost impact study. "As providers, administrators, and payers face added pressures from rising healthcare [costs](#), value-based [nutrition](#) interventions should be considered in all hospitals across the U.S."

Provided by Advocate Health Care

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