

# Improving care quality for hospitalized socially at-risk patients

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J. Margo Brooks Carthon, PhD, RN, FAAN, Associate Professor of Nursing at Penn Nursing. Credit: Penn Nursing

Nurses play a pivotal role in caring for hospitalized patients with social risk factors and preparing them for discharge. Now, a new study from the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing (Penn Nursing) illustrates how certain health system constraints present barriers to

effective care and impact outcomes for patients with high social risks.

"Few studies have explored whether acute care nurses are adequately supported in their practice environments to address the unique needs of socially at risk patients as they transition back into community settings," explained J. Margo Brooks Carthon, Ph.D., RN, FAAN, Associate Professor of Nursing, a Senior Fellow at the Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics, and lead investigator of the study. "Our findings suggest that prioritization of medical needs during acute care hospitalization and lack of organizational supports may deter nurses from fully addressing social concerns."

The outcomes of the qualitative study appear in an article titled "You Only Have Time For So Much in 12 Hours—Unmet Social Needs of Hospitalized Patients: A Qualitative Study of Acute Care Nurses," published online in the *Journal of Clinical Nursing*. The article suggests that while the development of new initiatives to address social risk is of value, care must be taken not to increase the burden placed on nurses or the [health](#) team.

"Nurses routinely include evaluations of the social risk factors as part of patient assessments; however, tailoring care to meet these additional needs may require changes to nursing workflow and traditional clinical roles," said Brooks Carthon. The study concludes with recommendations for hospital-based initiatives that aim to address the needs of socially at-risk patients to "incorporate the perspectives of [patients](#) and [health care providers](#) as collaborators in intervention design."

Provided by University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing

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