How nurses can improve quality while controlling costs

In health care, cost evaluation is not just about money. Health care is expensive, and nurses, like everyone else, must use resources responsibly. The primary message is to do the right thing, and get it right the first time. Repetition of care and correction of errors are costly in terms of quality, value, emotion and money.

Staff are expensive, so it is important to use time wisely and think about who is the best person to undertake a task and the technology that might help.

Health care is expensive, and nurses, like everyone else, must use resources responsibly. At the start of a new financial year there is usually a focus on budgets: how much was spent last year, what is available for next year and how savings will be made.

People are generally conscious of the items that cost a great deal, such as agency staff and scanning equipment, but many other items that cost little individually become expensive when multiplied.

Value

However, cost is not only about money, but the value derived from it. When treatment enhances a patient’s health and well-being, when it enables a person to return to a productive life, this is a gain for society.

Conversely, waste, injury and harm – such as from infection or injury – can carry a financial as well as a human cost that can be long-lasting. Hence, there is an argument that investing in safety reduces cost in the longer term.

So what does all this add up to for nurses in their daily work? The primary message is to do the right thing, and get it right the first time. Repetition of care and correction of errors are costly in terms of quality, value, emotion and money.

Engaging in decisions about equipment, supplies, medications and staffing can help find ways to improve quality while controlling costs. There are examples across the country of nurses doing exactly this, and it pays to find out what is possible.

Highly motivated, enthusiastic nurses find ways to improve cost-effective health care every day. Streamlining processes, such as recording patient notes digitally or reorganising a clinic, can improve quality and lead to resources being used more effectively.