What is Nurse Life Care Planning?

The American Nurses Association (ANA) defines nursing as the protection, promotion, and optimization of health and abilities, prevention of illness and injury, alleviation of suffering through the diagnosis and treatment of human response, and advocacy in the care of individuals, families, communities, and populations. The human response includes the response of the individual and family to actual or potential health problems. ANA notes “...Nurses are educated to be attuned to the whole person, not just the unique presenting health problem. While a medical diagnosis of an illness may be fairly circumscribed, the human response to a health problem may be much more fluid and variable and may have a great effect on the individual’s ability to overcome the initial medical problem. It is often said that physicians cure, and nurses care. In what some describe as a blend of physiology and psychology, nurses build on their understanding of the disease and illness process to promote the restoration and maintenance of health in their clients...” Nursing is a key element in patient survival as well as in the maintenance, rehabilitation, and preventive aspects of healthcare.

Nurses utilize their education and professional experience to develop a nursing care plan for their clients in a medical setting. Beginning with nursing school, nurses learned how to develop a nursing care plan. This nursing care plan is the essence of Nurse Life Care Planning. Nurse Life Care Planning is a specialized area of nursing practice dealing with individuals who sustained a catastrophic injury/illness. The nursing process is the foundation of Nurse Life Care Planning. Just as in nursing school and clinical settings, Nurse Life Care Planners use the nursing process to formulate a plan of care which is entitled a Nurse Life Care Plan. The Nurse Life Care Planner initiates the nursing process with a nursing assessment using a holistic approach to encompass the client, their support system, their environment, and their individual needs related to the injury/illness. The Nurse Life Care Planner identifies an appropriate nursing diagnosis to assist in the development of the Nurse Life Care Plan to describe the client’s individual needs. A Nurse Case Manager can be introduced to implement the Nurse Life Care Plan recommendations and evaluate the response to complete the nursing process.

The intention is to address the client as a whole using a team approach. The Nurse Life Care Plan is an estimate of needs using a collaborative approach of various Health Care Providers and their opinions. The nursing assessment is based on collecting subjective and objective data from observations, examinations, interviews, and written records. The data may include symptoms, growth and development, culture and religion, family health history, information collected by other health team members, ability to perform daily activities, environmental factors, educational/vocational background, and patterns of coping and interacting. The Nurse Life Care Plan is based on the assessment of the health status, establishing goals, and planning care as defined in the Nurse Practice Act. The Nurse Life Care Plan is intended to follow the client throughout his/her lifetime to ensure funds will be available to properly care for the client. The Nurse Life Care Plan is specific to the individual based on his/her needs. It is an estimate of medical care and costs based on the assessment and may be modified or reviewed as life situations change. The Nurse Life Care Plan may include medical needs and costs, future projections, and a vocational assessment. The contents of the Plan may be comprehensive or modified based on the needs of the requestor.
The Nurse Life Care Plan is a tool used for estimating healthcare needs of a client with a catastrophic injury/illness and chronic health care issues. The Nurse Life Care Plan addresses and projects the costs and frequency of needed goods and services over an estimated life span. It will project the needed equipment, replacement schedules, and maintenance. Equipment maintenance will vary with individual interests and use of the equipment. The costs included in this Life Care Plan are based on present day dollars and are obtained through interviews with suppliers, facilities, pharmacies, and other health care resources. The costs do not reflect inflationary trends of the health care industry. Allowances for inflation and any medical care trends should be determined by an economist. The Nurse Life Care Plan should be reviewed and updated by the Nurse Life Care Planner when there are significant changes to the medical condition.

**Who hires a Nurse Life Care Planner?**

Nurse Life Care Planners function in a variety of settings. Nurse Life Care Planners can be hired as a consultant or expert witness in a litigated case. Nurse Life Care Planners assist insurance companies, employers, plaintiff attorneys, and defense attorneys in the settlement process by identifying future needs and associated costs. In non-litigated cases, Nurse Life Care Planners can be hired by individuals who are planning for their future care or a loved one’s future care. Many Nurse Life Care Planners are entrepreneurs in their own businesses and provide services to the various entities. Depending on the case, Nurse Life Care Planners may choose to work with individual patients/families, insurance companies, managed care companies, case management companies, structured settlement companies, bank/trust officers, or attorneys. With the aging population and growing numbers of people with chronic health care issues, the future need for Nurse Life Care Planners continues to develop in unpredictable venues. Nurse Life Care Planners are expanding their roles outside of the legal system and are becoming creative in their nurse life care planning services to meet the individual needs of a case.

**How do I become a Certified Nurse Life Care Planner (CNLCP)?**

Nurse Life Care Planning is an extension of case management where the nurse has learned to perform an assessment, formulate a plan of care in collaboration with the health care team members, facilitate medical needs, and negotiate costs related to care. The Case Manager oversees the plan of care. Other specialties of nursing have similar experience such as rehabilitation, discharge planning, utilization review nurses, and home health nurses.

The criteria for sitting for the Nurse Life Care Planner certification exam includes: 1) licensed Registered Nurse for at least five years, 2) RN license must be active without restrictions, 3) RN experience must include at least two years of full time case management experience or the equivalent in nursing demonstrating experience in the continuum of care; and 4) five hundred hours of life care planning experience within two years of application OR a minimum of sixty continuing education units or its equivalent in contact hours specific to life care planning from a university or certificate course. Effective 2008, candidates will be required to submit a sample life care plan for peer review or proof that completion of a life care plan occurred during an approved life care planning course.

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The American Association of Nurse Life Care Planners (AANLCP) was established to promote a professional practice within nurse life care planning. Nurse Life Care Planners are encouraged to be members of AANLCP and attend the annual conferences for continuing education and networking among Nurse Life Care Planners. AANLCP website: aanlcp.org.