PACU delay reasons as a Process Improvement Measure

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Background: Patients from high volume areas such as the OR and ER encounter long waiting periods for inpatient beds due to high inpatient census. This phenomenon is due to bottlenecks in hospital throughput which causes patient dissatisfaction and discontinuity of care.

Objectives: To examine causes for delays for patients in the PACU awaiting an inpatient bed, delay codes were created to categorize reasons for length of stay in PACU patients who have met discharge criteria but cannot be transferred.

Process: Delay codes were developed to determine delay reasons external to the PACU. Data relevant to arrival time, discharge criteria and discharge from PACU to inpatient unit were time stamped and entered into the OR management information system.

Statement of the successful practice: In 2008, PACU discharge delays totaled 154,227 minutes. Data from this time period was compared to the delay minutes for January through October 2009. The top five reasons were identified and reported daily to various inpatient/PACU nurse managers and directors focused intervention.

Implication: Preliminary improvements aimed at decreasing PACU delay reasons has resulted in a 50% reduction in delay minutes.