Arterial catheters (AC) are widely used intra-operatively and post-operatively for continuous blood pressure monitoring and blood sampling. The care of ACs is routinely managed in critical care settings. When the patient meets discharge criteria in PACU, the anesthesiologist signs out the patient ending his role and responsibility for the overall care. Patients go from the PACU to PTU with the AC in place. This practice is not supported by the literature. With the creation of our Post Anesthesia Transition Unit (PTU) in 2007, the care and maintenance of ACs are carried through for overnight monitoring. Patients were being transferred to the PTU for management and/or removal of ACs without a physician’s order.

Arterial catheters are often used during surgery and kept in place for an extended time. The purpose of this project was to establish an evidence-based practice policy in the management of arterial catheters in monitored non-critical care setting.

Electronic databases used were PubMed, CINAHL, Scopus, Medline, ProQuest, and limited to 1993 to 2010, English, research-based, human, and adult. Key search terms were arterial catheter, adverse effect, radial artery, peripheral arterial catheter, indwelling, surgery, post-anesthesia, intensive care, arterial cannulation, time complication. Nineteen articles were identified; eight articles did not meet our inclusion criteria and were excluded, resulting in 11 articles.

Monitoring and troubleshooting of ACs require training, education, and experience. The knowledge and expertise of the nurse in the maintenance of these catheters are critical to successful recovery, safety, and quality of patient care delivery. Patients with ACs must be managed safely when the primary physician has determined it necessary to keep the arterial catheter for overnight monitoring in the PTU. The competency of the nurse and length of time the AC is left cannulated are vital to address. A collaborative policy has been developed to promote safety and continuity of care in the management of AC’s in our PACU and PTU. This evidence-based policy will ensure a standardized approach in the management of arterial catheters in our PACU and PTU.