PACU VISITATION DECREASES FAMILY MEMBER ANXIETY
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Introduction/Identification of Problem: Despite advocacy by professional organizations, no randomized controlled trials (RCT) have evaluated the response of family members to visitation with an adult patient during a Post Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU) stay.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this RCT was to evaluate the impact of PACU visitation on family members’ anxiety.

Methodology: Subjects were adult family members of Phase I general-anesthesia PACU patients. A pretest, posttest, RCT study design was used to evaluate a short visit with the PACU patient on family members’ anxiety. Family members completed a standardized anxiety survey immediately before random assignment to either a 10 minute visit with their PACU family member or usual care (no PACU visitation) with a placebo 10 minute visit to a surrounding surgical care area. Both groups completed the standardized anxiety survey at the end of the visitation period. Student’s t-test was used to determine if changes in anxiety scores were different for the two groups (p < 0.05). Sample size was determined a priori by power analysis.

Results: A total of 45 participants were studied over a 3 month period. Participants in the PACU visit group (N=24) had a decrease in anxiety after the visitation period (- 4.11 ± 6.4), with participants in the usual care group (no PACU visit) (N=21) having an increase of anxiety (+ 4.47 ± 6.6). Differences in anxiety change scores between the two groups were found to be statistically significant (t33 = 3.92, p=0.0004). No untoward events or negative experiences during the visit occurred for family member visitors to the PACU.

Discussion: Prior studies on visitation of adult PACU patients have focused on outcomes related to the patient, not the visitor. This is the first study to evaluate impact of visitation on the family member.

Conclusion: Family members who visited with an adult PACU patient had significantly lower anxiety levels after visitation than those who were not allowed to visit.

Implications for PACU Nurses and Future Research: Results from this study support the value and importance of PACU visitation for family members. Future research should focus on additional family member outcomes.