

PACU Pause: Standardizing Anesthesia Handoff in the PACU

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Background Information: Standardizing patient handoff from the Anesthesiologist to the Post Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU) nurse addresses patient safety concerns that arise from lack of effective communication. Previously in the PACU there was a lack of standardized patient handoff from the Anesthesiologist and Operating Room (OR) Nurse to the PACU Nurse. Without a standardized handoff process, the PACU nurses found that significant patient information was not being communicated. This led to patient safety concerns, miscommunication, and a lack of continuity of care.

Objectives of Project: The primary goal was to implement a standardized handoff process in the PACU called "PACU Pause". PACU Pause allows time for the PACU RN to assess the patient prior to report. Once the assessment was complete, the anesthesiologist provides a patient report in an SBAR format. The OR nurse follows with a detailed patient report. The PACU nurse would then be able to ask questions and address any concerns. The outcome of this quality improvement initiative was to improve communication, decrease errors, and enhance the patient and family experience.

Process of Implementation: PACU Pause was created by PACU's Unit Based Council to improve the handoff process and allow for time to assess the patient upon arrival to PACU. The staff presented the project to the PACU and OR leadership teams and the Anesthesiologist group for feedback and support. Once approved education was provided to the PACU and OR staff about the standardized handoff process. PACU Pause signs listing expectations were placed in each bay as a reminder. An audit tool was provided to the PACU nurses to complete after receiving report.

Statement of Successful Practice: The implementation of PACU Pause increased the amount of complete patient handoffs by 87%. The PACU nurses felt that they were more knowledgeable about their patients and able to care for them safely. Phone calls to the OR team for questions or clarification decreased.

Implications for Advancing the Practice of Perianesthesia Nursing: The results showed that the implementation of PACU Pause helped to provide the PACU nurses with the information necessary to safely care for their patients. To build on this success, Perioperative Services is taking steps to improve nurse to nurse handoff from Pre-op to the OR.