Effective Communication among Providers through
Visual Color Coding System

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Communication is an important aspect of continuity patient care. Through effective and good communication among hospital providers that excellent care to our patients are provided effectively. It is through this context that our department needed to find new ways to improve communication among each other without being disturbed while performing tasks to the patients and the disappointment of not finding staff around the nurses’ station. Thus, the staff thought of developing a color coding system to create and maintain good working relationships with our fellow co-workers (RN’s, unlicensed assistive personnel-the PCA’s), physicians and other departmental personnel such as pharmacy, central supply and CSPD and to facilitate and enhance better communication system.

Surgical Observation Unit is an extended observation unit for post-outpatient surgery and same day admissions requiring an overnight stay. This exclusive and unique 10-beds unit is limited in their bed capacity due to the limited space available and staffing concerns (2 RNs and 1 unlicensed staff called PCA [patient care assistant] per shift). Because of the limited number of staff, there are times when physicians making rounds are disappointed of some delayed orders because surgeons and residents would leave patient’s charts at the desk or placed inside the cubby holder outside the patient’s room. Physicians fail to communicate directly to the nurses regarding new or revised written orders. Stickers were used initially but were found to be ineffective. A visual color coding system was installed that include information such as: new physician’s orders, tests, potential discharge, dirty or clean bed, ready for admission, and stop-do not enter. Each color coding system assigned for each patient had specific colors assigned which can be pulled out so the staff can see them even from afar and familiarize what each color stands for. This allowed the staff who are busy and pre-occupied in a patient's room be more cognizant of new orders, ongoing tests, rooms not been cleaned yet, etc. In order to be successful, all staff involved were oriented and encouraged to use this color coding system consistently.

The utilization of this color coding system has improved multidisciplinary communication in this department. There is ongoing collaboration between physicians, nurses, PCA, housekeeping and transporters. With this improvement in place, the incidence of missed or delayed orders were minimized, cleaning of dirty discharged rooms are faster and flipped as clean rooms, etc. This resulted in improved physician, staff and patient satisfaction, as well as reduction of delay of services, and resulting to an excellent faithful, loving and caring institution.