

NEUROLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IN THE POST-OPERATIVE ANESTHESIA CARE UNIT: IDENTIFICATION AND MANAGEMENT

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

When neurological emergencies present themselves, they often appear in clinical symptoms that occur much earlier and serve as a precursor to the actual problem. However, in the Post Anesthesia Recovery Unit (PACU), these early symptoms are often masked by pre- and intra-operative medications and prolonged anesthesia. We identified a need to create a focused neuro assessment educational resource to educate experienced and novice nurses to accurately assess, identify, and address clinical signs of an early neurological emergency.

OBJECTIVES OF PROJECT:

The purpose of this project was to increase nurses' knowledge and competence of a focused neurological assessment in the immediate post-operative patient. We provided an educational presentation, critical thinking scenarios, and one-to-one discussion with compliance of current ASPAN guidelines.

PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTATION:

After assessing the needs of the PACU nurses, we created a PowerPoint presentation entitled "Neurological Emergencies in the Post Anesthesia Care Unit". The PowerPoint and critical thinking scenarios were provided to the post anesthesia care unit nurses on a one-to-one basis. To evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching modalities, we administered a five question Likert scale to 30 PACU nurses specific to the topic. Out of 30 PACU nurses, we received 25 completed surveys. Overall, 83% of staff surveyed felt the topic and information were both relevant and resourceful in our current PACU practice.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ADVANCING THE PRACTICE OF PERIANESTHESIA NURSING:

An alteration in a patient's neurological status can be a life threatening emergency in the PACU. By creating and implementing a focused educational presentation and open dialogue among the PACU nurses, early detection of a neurological emergency may be recognized. The information presented provides the novice and expert PACU nurse alike with a unit-based resource to address neurological emergencies.