

STANDARDIZED COMMUNICATION TO IMPROVE PATIENT SAFETY IN THE PACU

Team Leader: Laura McDougall APRN CNS MSN RN PCCN

Sharp Mary Birch Hospital for Women and Newborns, San Diego, California

Background Information: Poor communication continues to be one of the leading root-causes of sentinel events across the nation. In the fast-paced PACU setting, lack of communication, understanding of roles and responsibilities, and processes for ensuring timely management when a patient deteriorates can impact a patient's risk for severe harm or death.

Objectives of Project: The purpose of this project was to establish clear guidelines and expectations for communication between PACU RNs, anesthesiologists and surgeons, the use of appropriate chain of command, practice effective communication techniques for deteriorating patients, and to incorporate the Maternal Early Obstetric Warning System into practice in a women's specialty hospital.

Process of Implementation: Feedback from RNs and physicians from PACU emergencies and complicated PACU patients was analyzed and areas for improvement were identified. Guidelines for communication, chain of command algorithms, and RN to physician communication tools were put in a concept map. Revisions to physician standardized orders were also made to consistently support the new guidelines. RNs and physicians were educated on TEAMSTEPS® communication tools and the standardized guidelines. One hundred percent of the RNs completed a self-audit of a patient that met criteria for notification of an MD to verify knowledge of the communication algorithms. Recent sentinel events related to communication failures were used in simulation scenarios for sepsis and postpartum hemorrhage in the PACU to validate and reinforce the application of the guidelines.

Statement of Successful Practice: Forty-nine medical records of patients requiring physician notification were audited in a three month period and 100% compliance with the algorithm was achieved. Nurses reported improvements in confidence and knowledge when identifying signs and symptoms of critically-ill patients and communication with physicians after simulation. Communication openness was also increased by 14%. Ongoing surveillance is maintained through maternal sentinel event review committee looking at adherence to guidelines, which has been 100% since implementation.

Implications for Advancing the Practice of Perianesthesia Nursing: Establishing standard roles and responsibilities, using standardized tools to enhance communication, and creating a shared vision related to the communication in the PACU can facilitate the removal of barriers and help improve patient safety.