

A Bird's Eye View of PACU Triage

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Background Information: Our hospital census has been increasing to outstanding numbers, creating new challenges within the Perioperative Department. With the closure of several surrounding hospitals, merging of our outpatient surgical center, alternative care units occupying post anesthesia care unit (PACU) spaces, increase of daily surgeries, and creation of an outpatient stay unit; our triage Clinical Nurse IV role was necessary to problem solve twenty-four hours a day. Our department has 6 specialty units, with 134 beds and 200 staff. A usual day consists of 130 surgeries.

Objectives of Project: By expanding the role of triage nurses, we are able to improve throughput, staff/patient satisfaction, OR holdings, unit issues, manage inpatient bed placement, evening PACU consolidation, and implement a PACU Core float team.

Process of Implementation: Our leadership team realized the importance of having twenty-four hour triage coverage which includes multiple nurses in a hybrid role of leadership and clinical which includes:

- Patient integration and placement meetings
- Weekly/daily staffing
- House-wide bed huddles
- Charge nurse and break relief coverage
- First case on-time start delays
- Problem solving within units
- Distributing and diverting OR cases throughout the PACUs
- Evening PACU consolidation to one centralized PACU unit
- Creation of a PACU CORE team

Statement of Successful Practice: The role of triage coverage ensures adequate staffing for safe patient care. OR holding has decreased by diverting cases to other PACU units. House-wide bed meetings ensure proper patient placement to decompress the PACUs. Implementation of the PACU Core group helps fill staffing gaps. By coordinating and combining all resources and staff to our 24-hour unit, evening consolidation and staggered shift times increase staff satisfaction, allowing patients to continue to receive appropriate and timely care, and staff to end their shift on-time.

Implications for Advancing the Practice of Perianesthesia Nursing:

PACU triage is responsible for daily operational flow within the Perioperative department, ensuring safe and smooth transition of patient care delivery from pre, intra, and post operative units to the appropriate surgical unit. The role of PACU triage can help strengthen institutions that are seeking expansion within their Perioperative Department by managing the efficiency and flow of patients and staffing through the PACUs to ensure safe quality patient care.