

Streamlining PACU Operations: Innovative Strategies to Enhance Post-Anesthesia Care Unit Flow

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Abstract Background Information: The Post-Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU) is pivotal in managing the recovery of surgical patients. Delays in transferring patients from the PACU due to the unavailability of inpatient beds or inefficiencies in the discharge process, known as PACU holds, significantly disrupt hospital operations. These holds lead to delayed surgeries, case cancellations, diminished staff satisfaction, poor patient experiences, and ultimately, decreased hospital revenue. Prior to this project, PACU holds had become a frequent, troubling issue, causing operational bottlenecks that affected both staff morale and patient care.

Objectives of Project: The goal of this project was to identify the root causes of PACU holds, enhance patient flow within the unit, and reduce hold times, thereby improving overall perioperative efficiency.

Process of Implementation: We conducted a thorough review of the PACU workflow and historical data on patient flow and bed availability over a six-month period to identify the root causes. Key strategies included enhancing collaboration through huddles, interdisciplinary rounds, liaison for surgical teams, and bed flow team utilization, improving interdepartmental communications through a broadband internal communication system, adjusting staffing hourly based on unit volume, reviewing and adjusting the length of stay based on surgical procedures and evidence-based practice, standardizing discharge criteria, and developing a surge management plan.

Statement of Successful Practice: The concerted efforts of planning, teamwork, and strategic interventions led to a remarkable 95% reduction in PACU hold times within the first three months post-implementation. This success not only increased the surgical patients flow but also significantly enhanced both staff satisfaction, making them feel valued and appreciated, and patient experiences.

Implications for Advancing the Practice of Perianesthesia Nursing: This project exemplifies the effectiveness of collaborative, data-driven decision-making and systematic process improvements. The significant reductions in hold times underscore the potential for similar strategies to be applied in other institutions facing PACU delays. Continued refinement of patient flow processes, along with ongoing monitoring and feedback mechanisms, will ensure the sustainability of these improvements and foster opportunities for further enhancements in perianesthesia care.