

## **Shockingly Fun: Reducing EKG Anxiety One Puzzle at a Time**

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**Abstract Background Information:** Accurate EKG rhythm identification is a critical competency for nurses in critical care settings. To ensure ongoing proficiency, EKG competency assessments are required annually. Traditionally, this competency has been evaluated through a test consisting of multiple-choice questions addressing cardiac rhythm interpretation and appropriate clinical response. Many nurses have reported experiencing increased anxiety related to this testing format, which may impact performance and overall learning engagement.

**Objectives of Project:** To reduce anxiety associated with EKG identification assessments by developing an alternative competency method that is both engaging and relevant to perianesthesia nursing practice.

**Process of Implementation:** Leveraging gamification as an educational strategy, a hands-on EKG puzzle was developed to assess rhythm identification competency. The puzzle included three components: EKG rhythm strips, corresponding rhythm names, and appropriate treatments. In alignment with ASPAN's minimal staffing requirements for Phase I recovery, nurses worked in pairs to complete the activity. To demonstrate competency, participants were required to accurately match each rhythm strip with its correct name and associated intervention. A score of 80% or higher was considered a passing benchmark. Upon completion, registered nurses were invited to complete a survey to evaluate satisfaction with the assessment method.

**Statement of Successful Practice:** A total of 154 nurses completed the EKG puzzle activity, 98 of which completed a follow-up survey evaluating their experience. Among the survey respondents:

- 94.9% agreed or strongly agreed that the EKG puzzle was less anxiety-provoking than a traditional test.
- 97.9% agreed or strongly agreed that the puzzle was useful to their nursing practice.
- 96.9% expressed a preference for gamification over traditional testing as an assessment method.

These findings highlight the effectiveness of gamification in reducing test-related anxiety while reinforcing critical clinical skills relevant to perianesthesia nursing.

**Implications for Advancing the Practice of Perianesthesia Nursing:** The success of the EKG puzzle suggests that incorporating interactive, engaging educational methods can enhance learning outcomes and staff confidence in critical skills. The high acuity environment of the perianesthesia specialty, where timely recognition of cardiac dysrhythmias can impact patient safety is critical. This approach offers a promising model for competency assessment and education, and may improve knowledge retention, foster team engagement, and support a culture of continuous learning.