

Improving PACU Efficiency: Reducing Post-Anesthesia Length of Stay for Orthopedic Patients Through Inpatient X-Ray Implementation

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Abstract Background Information: Recognizing deficiencies in postoperative protocols is vital for improving perioperative efficiencies and enhancing patient experience. A Post-Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU) in a quaternary academic medical institution in Los Angeles, California, has been experiencing extended durations of stay for its orthopedic postoperative patients. In response, the unit leadership from the PACU and Inpatient Orthopedic Unit collaborated to implement a new practice for post-op x-rays, with the goal of reducing the PACU length-of-stay (LOS) for orthopedic inpatients.

Objectives of Project: To reduce the average PLOS for inpatient orthopedic patients over a 4-week period through inpatient x-ray implementation.

Process of Implementation: In collaboration with the leadership of the inpatient orthopedic unit, a change was implemented that allowed post-operative x-rays to be conducted in the inpatient rooms. This new process differed from the previous workflow, which required post-operative x-rays to be performed in the PACU before transferring patients. Data collection and chart audits were conducted to monitor trends and progress.

Statement of Successful Practice: A reduction in PLOS was observed over a period of four weeks. PLOS was measured from “In PACU” time to “PACU Care Complete” time as documented in EPIC.

- Pre-Implementation: June 27 to July 27, the average PLOS was 81 minutes.
- Post-Implementation: July 28 to August 29, the average PLOS was 62 minutes.

This reflects a 23.5% overall reduction in the average PLOS.

Implications for Advancing the Practice of Perianesthesia Nursing: The intervention implemented has successfully reduced the average PLOS for inpatient orthopedics. Future studies will investigate the sustainability of this intervention beyond 4 weeks, its applicability to other surgical populations, and its effect on patient and staff experience. Additional study may also explore cost-effectiveness and overall impact on hospital efficiency to determine broader adoption potential.