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How will the use of a black out hour and the improvement in handoff communication increase patient safety when arriving on the medical surgical units?

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Background

The change of shift hour for nurses tends to be the busiest time of the shift. Completing the final tasks of the day and ensuring patients are ready to be handed off to the next nurse. Taking admissions at the time of shift change delays care for the patient who is arriving to the unit. It also severely interrupts the flow of nurse-to-nurse handoff, allowing for miscommunication and information to be lost. Delay of care to the patient who arrived at shift change allows for the patient status to decline. Change of shift admissions also increase nurse's frustration and workload. Most importantly change of shift admissions pose a risk for patient safety. On this unit specifically there are frequent change of shift admissions that occur.

Problem

How will the use of a black out hour and the improvement in handoff communication increase patient safety when arriving on the medical surgical units.

Review of Literature

Through the search yielded many articles but only three were used for this research:

The first study used was a level two retrospective comparative study from South Miami Hospital. The purpose of this study was to see if there was a delay of care to patients that were admitted during shift change verses any other time during the shift. This study focused on patients who were admitted to a medical surgical unit. This study found that although there was not a delay in care necessarily to patients admitted during shift change there was an increase in adverse events that occurred at this time versus during any other time in the shift. The recommendations from this study was to incorporate a black out hour to help minimize adverse events that take place during the time of shift change. This study did not directly support the use of a black out hour, but it does expose the increase in adverse events that took place during this time.

The second study used was a level three inclusion review that highlighted the importance of handoff between nurses. This study looked at the importance of adequate handoff between nurse at the change of shift and the negative outcomes associated with interruptions during the hand off period. This study highlights not only the importance but the dangers that are imposed on patients who are arriving to the unit at change of shift. This study also recommends implementing changes that decrease patient transfers at the time of handoff to improve patient safety and satisfaction. The study in turn also highlights the benefits of uninterrupted nurse handoff.

The final study used a level three exploratory descriptive design. This was similar to the second article used as it explores the importance of uninterrupted handoff between nurses at the change of shift. Within this study nurse to nurse handoff was observed and the number of interruptions were noted. The interruptions were also assessed to see the adverse effects that were caused by the interruptions. Some interruptions that were caused were a result of clarification questions, but there were some interruptions were caused by admissions to the unit.

The two similar articles help to highlight the importance of uninterrupted handoff between nurses. This ensures accurate information is being transferred from one nurse to the next. These articles highlighted the possible adverse events that could occur if handoff is interrupted. In conjunction with the first article used, the conclusions you can draw from these articles is that the thirty minutes to an hour prior to the change of shift is not only busy but is crucial to patient care. Change of shift admissions not only interrupt the handoff between nurses allowing for information to be lost or miscommunicated and it also decreases patient safety when arriving onto the unit for admission.

Next Steps

Recommendations moving forward:

- Encourage a black out hour from ED admissions the hour prior to the change of shift
- Minimize interruptions during handoff between nurses
- Use effective communication when providing nurse to nurse handoff
- Increase communication between the emergency department and med-surg floor on change of shift admissions

References

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