

Nurses Improving Care for Healthsystem Elders



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PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF ACUTE CONSTIPATION IN HOSPITALIZED PATIENTS

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PROBLEM: Constipation can cause physical complications in patients and increase length of hospital stay.

SOLUTION: Prevent or manage acute constipation in hospitalized patients by increasing the number of patients who have a bowel movement every 2-3 days.

Problem Identified Constipation is an important issue for the hospitalized patient, especially the older adult patient, because it can result in complications such as abdominal pain, distention, nausea, decreased appetite, fecal impaction, excessive strain leading to dizziness, rectal pain and bleeding, urinary retention, obstruction and potential delay in discharge from the hospital.



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Solution Formulated The goals of the constipation program at Christiana Care Health System were to increase the number of patients who have a bowel movement (BM) every 2-3 days, if clinically appropriate, and to improve the documentation of BMs. To accomplish these goals, an interdisciplinary Constipation Care Management Guideline Team was formed. The team created an action plan that detailed potential solutions to the constipation problem:

- Revise current Constipation Algorithm (Prevention & Treatment of Constipation)
- Develop nurse-driven constipation protocol/order set
- Obtain approval for “Standing Orders by Protocol for Constipation” by Medical Executive Committee, other appropriate committees and nursing councils
- Share baseline data with nursing leadership and staff
- Develop and roll out educational plan using “train the trainers” process
- Add constipation protocol/order set to the admission packet
- Add “size & consistency” to the graphic sheet
- Add “date of last bowel movement” to the Medical/Surgical flow sheet and Admission Referral Process
- Make Fiberfull pudding readily available through Registered Dietitians

NICHE Role NICHE's Geriatric Resource Nurse (GRN) core curriculum defines geriatric syndromes as a serious medical condition or illness with many different causes. They can occur as the direct result of medical and nursing care during hospitalization. When this happens, geriatric syndromes are seen as a form of iatrogenesis. Common geriatric syndromes such as constipation have risk factors that may be identified and reduced with early treatment. The GRN education outlines care strategies nurses can use to deal with geriatric syndromes. The program developed at Christiana Care Health System builds on this platform.

Evaluation/Results Implementation of the new protocol resulted in:

- Percentage of patients who did not have a BM in 4 days or more decreased by 25% (from 8% to 6%)
- Percentage of patients without documentation of BM decreased by >50% (from 21% to 10%)
- Percentage of patients who had a BM in 1-3 days increased by 15% (from 71% to 84%)

Based on these results, all measures met or exceeded the team's expectations, helping prevent potential complications from constipation and avoiding delay in discharge. Key lessons learned here included:

- Standing Orders by Protocols, initiated by nurses, can drive change over time
- Interdisciplinary team approach is key to the development and implementation of new processes

For more information

1. Fletcher, K. (2005). Elimination: Geriatric Self-Learning Module. *MEDSURG Nursing*. 14 (2), 127-131.
2. Krogh, K. & Laurberg, S. (2009). Constipation in the elderly: investigation and management. *Aging Health* 5 (5), 671-682.
3. Spinzi, A., Amaldo, I., Gianni, L., Nicoletta, M., Giovanna, P., Silvia, R. et al. (2009). Constipation in the Elderly: Management Strategies. *Drugs & Aging* 26(6), 469-474.
4. Christiana Care Health System Constipation Care Management Guideline.

NICHE-related resources

1. Nutrition, Hydration, and Oral Health in the NICHE GRN Core Curriculum. http://www.nicheprogram.org/knowledge_center
2. What are Your Patient's Comfort Needs? in the NICHE Geriatric Patient Care Associate Curriculum. http://www.nicheprogram.org/knowledge_center

About NICHE

NICHE is a national organization designed to help health care professionals in hospitals improve the care of older adults. NICHE hospitals seek to create an environment where older adult patients receive care that results in better outcomes. This climate of success encourages patients and their families to seek NICHE designated hospitals for their medical needs. The NICHE Network now numbers nearly 300 hospitals throughout North America.

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