

Nurses Improving Care for Healthsystem Elders

NICHE



NICHE SOLUTION #13 • 2011

COMMUNICATION TO ENHANCE FUNCTION – A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Authors:

Hazel Johnson RN, BSN, MSN

Sonia Barriault RN, BSN

Marie Andree Maher MOA, S-LP®

Ariane Poulin MPO

Campbellton Regional Hospital
Campbellton, New Brunswick, Canada

PROBLEM: Communication gaps occur among patients, families and interdisciplinary teams caring for the older adult patient.

SOLUTION: A pictogram system was developed to speed and enhance communication between all of the parties involved.

Problem Identified The interdisciplinary team working on the Campbellton Regional Hospital geriatric unit recognized that patients' functional abilities were not consistently and readily communicated to nursing staff, the team, patients and families. The group had attempted several different projects to enhance communication on the unit with only mediocre success.



Series Editor: Marie Boltz, PhD, RN • Managing Editor: Scott Bugg

Nurses Improving Care for Healthsystem Elders

Solution Formulated An initiative was undertaken, in collaboration with the communication disorders department, to find a method to speed up and enhance communication. Pictograms were proposed as a solution to the problem. Pictograms are an established technique to facilitate communication.

Four goals were established for the initiative:

- Increase communication involving patients, families and the interdisciplinary team about patients' functional abilities and their security
- Provide a visual means of communications in a strategic location
- Provide a visual means of communications which would be understood by all parties
- Provide a means of testing the success of the initiative

There were 46 pictograms developed and agreed upon by the team and independent reviewers to indicate various aspects of a patient's functional capabilities. Patients, families and team members involved in the project were collectively taught the meaning of each pictogram. On the geriatric unit, boards were placed at the foot of each bed facing the patient with his/her requirements for function and safety represented using the relevant pictograms.

NICHE ROLE NICHE promotes the idea that patients (and their caregivers) benefit from robust participation in decisions that affect their personal health outcomes. While it is not uncommon for the decision-making capacity of older adults to diminish, fluctuate, or lapse, older adults should not be denied the opportunity to make those specific healthcare decisions they are capable of making. Therefore it is imperative that the interdisciplinary team be able to clearly communicate the patient's clinical situation to the all members of the team, the patient and the patient's family.

Evaluation/Results After six months, a survey of the program participants on the use of the pictograms revealed that 83% of the respondents were "satisfied/very satisfied" with the improved communication between the patient, family and interdisciplinary team. Generally, the communications technique saved time and helped provide teaching opportunities with patients and families.

For more information 1. Bennett, J. A. (2002). Maintaining and improving physical function in elders. *Annual Review of Nursing Research*, 20, 3-33.

NICHE-related resources 1. Kresevic, D. M. (2008). Assessment of function. In E. Capezuti, D. Zwicker, M. Mezey, & T. Fulmer (Eds.) *Evidence-based geriatric nursing protocols for best practice*. (3rd ed.) (pp. 23-40). New York: Springer Publishing Company, Inc.
2. Preventing Functional Decline. The NICHE GRN Core Curriculum. <http://elearningcenter.nicheprogram.org/course/view.php?id=2>

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.

NICHE is a program of The Hartford Institute for Geriatric Nursing at NYU College of Nursing funded in part with generous support from Atlantic Philanthropies and The John A. Hartford Foundation. For more information visit www.nicheprogram.org.

NICHE