Improving Patient Admissions With Dedicated Admission Nurses

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The hospital admission process is a time-consuming yet a vital process. Because of the amount of time needed for this process, the admission process can become fragmented and can lead to staff and patient dissatisfaction. The information gathered during admission provides the information needed to formulate nursing diagnoses, the nursing plan of care, and a plan for discharge. A timely and thorough admission process contributes to patient safety and provision of excellent, patient-centered care.

The average length of stay at acute care hospitals has decreased in the last 10 years, whereas patient acuity has been on the rise. In addition, the problem of overcrowding in emergency departments across the country results in long waits, increased hours of diversion, and decreases in patient satisfaction and staff morale. At the same time, changes in hospital documentation, medication administration, and nursing practices to increase patient safety have impacted the workload of the staff nurse, placing tough demands on the time and energy of nurses.

Staff nurses must be supported by nurse leaders in their quest for providing excellent patient care. Failure to support nursing efforts results in staff frustration and dissatisfaction. A recent research study indicates that 92% of nurses surveyed associate the nursing shortage with the quality of patient care and the amount of time spent with patients. In the same study, an improved work environment was cited by 89% of the nurses as a good strategy to solve the nursing shortage, whereas 49% felt that the use of support staff would help ease the nursing shortage. Quality of work life also impacts the quality of patient care. Factors that affect quality of work include positive attitude, relief of emotional and physical stress, and nurse empowerment within the local unit to overcome barriers. Sadly, data indicate that nurses are leaving the profession in large numbers or leaving the bedside to pursue their careers in other areas.

The Admissions Nurse

The staff nurses of the cardiac medical-surgical unit of Central DuPage Hospital in Winfield, Illinois, needed support with the labor-intensive admission process. The amount of time needed to complete the admission process for patients admitted to this nursing unit typically ranges from 30 to 90 minutes. This is a sizeable amount of time for most nurses to spend giving undivided attention to one patient and family during the course of the day. Nurses were finding it difficult to complete aspects of the admission process in a timely manner.

The nursing leaders and staff of this unit felt that teamwork, patient flow, and patient satisfaction could be improved by the introduction of dedicated admission nurses. This nursing unit, with 34 telemetry-monitored beds, has a high level of patient activity, with an average daily admission rate of 8 patients and a discharge rate of 10 patients.
The unit is very busy with a possible 65% daily patient turnover rate. Typical patient diagnoses include congestive heart failure, post-myocardial infarction, post-cardiac bypass surgery, pneumonia, or any other medical/surgical diagnosis with a cardiac component. Many patients are admitted to this unit from the emergency department.

With the support of the patient care manager, 2 nurses on the unit took on the challenge of researching best practices for the admission nurse role. From best practices, these staff nurses created a job description for the admission nurse. At the same time, actual numbers of admissions, transfers, and discharges were trended over a 3-month period to determine the peak hours to best use the admission nurse. To determine which specific aspects of the admission process they could most effectively and efficiently complete, the admission nurses spent several shifts working with nurses on the unit, observing admission and discharge processes.

A tool was designed to keep track of admissions and their source, such as emergency department or cardiac interventional unit. This tool also tracks patient admission tasks such as completing a physical assessment of the patient and charting in computer, completing the medication reconciliation and posting to chart, obtaining physician orders, and initiating the nursing plan of care.

A report sheet was also developed for the admission nurse not only to aid in giving a thorough report on the patient to the primary nurse but also to let the primary nurse know which admission tasks still needed to be completed. That tool facilitated a smooth handoff between admission nurse and the patient’s primary nurse.

The 2 nurses then became the admission nurses on a trial basis. Six months after beginning the admission nurse role, staff nurses on the unit indicated that they felt better able to perform the nursing tasks associated with the admission process. Staff nurses also indicated that the admission experience was much more positive and streamlined for the patient. Routinely collected patient satisfaction data validated the nurses’ perceptions of the positive patient experience since a higher percentage of patients rated admission process to this unit as excellent.

Increase in communication and teamwork has been an added benefit with the addition of the admission nurse. Quality time is spent with each newly admitted patient, introducing them to aspects of excellent care such as hourly rounds to ensure comfort and safety and prompt answering of patient questions. Information obtained by the admission nurse is passed on to the primary nurse and care technician for use in planning personalized care. From a patient and staff point of view, the admissions nurse has definitely streamlined the admissions process, making a definite contribution to patient and nurse satisfaction.

**Implications for Nurse Leaders**

Providing high-quality patient care in complex practice environments is a challenge. Now more than ever, nurse leaders are called upon to embrace creative and evidence-based strategies to support staff nurses in the provision of excellent patient care. By including nursing participation in decisions related to staffing, increase in job satisfaction and lowered rates of burnout occur.7

Research findings point out that the practice setting is a critical consideration for developing higher job satisfaction. Nurses are less likely to report job tension or the propensity to leave when there is a greater emphasis on cultivating a favorable practice setting.6

Admission registered nurses (RNs) have been shown to have a positive effect on the practice environment. Having a dedicated admission RN may improve the admission experience for the patient, increase the capture of information, and help nurses to feel more effective and informed in a complex practice environment.

According to a recent American Nurses Association6 satisfaction survey, nurses related satisfaction with the profession to connectedness with other staff and patients. Also, both productivity and intent to stay in nursing are impacted by hospital environments that decrease job stress, improve the ability of RNs to deliver high-quality of care, and ensure the health and safety of nurses.7

Admission nurses can have a positive impact on the practice environment. Research studies indicate that admission nurse programs can increase overall nurse satisfaction by relieving staff nurses of the burden of admissions documentation.10 After implementation of admission nurse programs, benefits cited include reduced unit staff workload, decreased unit staff reluctance to accept new patients, and increased information capture on
initial patient assessment (Health Care Advisory Board interviews and analysis). Implementing an admission nurse program can increase satisfaction for both staff nurses and patients.

REFERENCES