Implementing a Structured Nurse to Nurse Communication Strategy: A Practice Change

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Background
Ineffective communication is linked to:
• 251,000 annual preventable deaths
• Greater than 1 million annual injuries in U.S
• 80% of serious errors occurring at patient handoffs between nurses

Aim
The aim of this project was to improve nurse and patient satisfaction.

The Practice Change Pilot
To pilot a new process for patient handoff.
This evidence-based practice project was determined by the IRB not to be Human Subjects Research.

Methods
Design: The Iowa Model will guide implementation of this practice change.
Sample: All RNs working in an ICU and a CVCU in a 221-bed acute-care hospital in the Midwest.
Procedure
RNs on the pilot units:
• completed an online pre-test survey
• participated in a training session on use of the handoff tool
• completed an online post-test survey
Data Collection/Analysis
• The CSQ and additional survey questions measured nursing communication satisfaction pre- and post-intervention.
• SBAR Competency Checklist monitored compliance with use of the handoff tool.
• The researcher-developed Rounding Questionnaire assessed RNs’ perceptions related to implementing the handoff tool.
• Changes in patient satisfaction were measured pre- and post-intervention using the HCAHPS survey.

The Intervention: SBAR Handoff Tool

Results
SBAR Competency Checklist
Over the course of four weeks, the project leader observed 36 patient handoffs:
• Of 11 observations made on the ICU, 7 (64%) RNs used the SBAR process during handoff, but only 1 (9%) RN used or referred to the SBAR pilot tool.
• Of the 25 observations made on the CVCU, 16 (64%) RNs used the SBAR process, but only 9 (36%) RNs used or referred to the SBAR pilot tool.

Rounding Questionnaire
The project leader rounded on 14 RNs (5 ICU RNs and 9 CVCU RNs) before and after change of shift. Answers were grouped into 3 categories:
• SBAR is good but my format is better
• New nurses need better coaching on report
• Not invested

Conclusion
Nurses remained dissatisfied with nurse-to-nurse communication. If handoff is to become standardized, a consensus on its process and structure is crucial to implementation success. There must be strong nursing leadership support, staff buy-in, and consistent training for effective changes in practice to occur.