Hear Me, See Me, and Serve Me: An Analysis of Communication Importance Between Patients and Nurses

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Abstract

 Communication is often credited for being the backbone of healthcare. Without appropriate and successful communication, many healthcare providers struggle with accomplishing a common goal, and it is often the patient who suffers the most. Communication between the patient and the nurse also dictates what kind of care the patient receives; if the nurse is unable to understand the patient, anything beyond the patient’s most basic needs may not be met. The purpose of this performance improvement project is to improve acute patient healthcare by increasing the communication effectiveness between the patient and the nurse with the intentions of meeting more than just the basic needs of the patient. This intervention was implemented in July 2016. The nursing and administrative staff was very receptive when this information was conveyed. The following information contains a need analysis, proposed solution, and sustainability and effectiveness, supplemented by current research on communication and its role in improving patient care.

Keywords: communication, flashcards, post-anesthesia, medical-surgical

Needs Analysis

Patients cannot always communicate effectively after anesthesia, while in pain, or when drowsy. Nurses also try not to disturb other patients in the two and four-man rooms at night when trying to communicate with other patients sharing the room. The aforementioned situations often create a barrier of communication between the nurse and patient. This barrier is sometimes due to the patient’s post-operative status and the lasting effects of anesthesia. Other times where communication can be misconstrued can be related to nurses who are in so much pain that they cannot express what they need. There are other times where the patient is simply drowsy, whether it be from medication or lack of rest, and times where the nurse is trying not to disturb the other veterans in the room; however, patients can still have unmet needs during this time, and nurses need a quick and easy way to check for these needs. 2F-Surgical does not currently have a flashcard method of patient communication in place. There is a need for a form of communication, preferably a visual aid, which will allow nurses to communicate with patients who meet the aforementioned criteria.

Proposed Solution

To better facilitate communication between patients in pain, coming off of anesthesia, or taxed from physical and drug therapies, communication flashcards with commonly requested tasks and needs should be developed. The end resulting product will be given to nurses as a ring-bound laminated flashcard set of common requests/needs to facilitate easier communication with patients who have something impeding their communication. When the nurse is met with a patient who is posing to be difficult to communicate with, he or she can retrieve this set of cards from the nurse’s station and use it to better convey information to the patient in the form of questions with a corresponding picture and simple phrase.

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Communication is the driving force behind many actions, decisions, and ultimately outcomes in many professions, including healthcare. The way that providers, administration, and patients interact with one another can have a tremendous impact on patient care and work relationships. According to Keltner, Bostrom, & McGuinness (2011), “most communication is a two-way process between two or more individuals. In nursing, this process is focused on patients’ needs and problems” (p. 60). Some patients’ needs are not as clearly defined as others’; nurses often have to utilize multiple resources to successfully provide holistic care to the patient. Speech and comprehension may seem like a simple task, however, when patients have an alteration in either of the two, patient communication is slightly compromised. “For nurses who work with patients with alterations in thinking, feelings, and behavior, the challenge of communicating is . . . greater” (Keltner, Bostrom & McGuinness, 2011, p. 60).

 These challenges can be seen in patients recovering from anesthesia, patients taking medications that make them drowsy, and patients who are in pain: “Physical pain often interferes with patients’ abilities to think clearly and concentrate and might affect the sense of priority regarding problems to be addressed” (Keltner, Bostrom & McGuinness, 2011, p. 62). Pain not only can inhibit the patient from communicating clearly, but also can interfere with the healing process. As healthcare providers, nurses must work to make pain tolerable for patients while meeting their other needs. In a retrospective evaluation of communication in the acute setting, “research studies showed that [patients] are dissatisfied with the insufficient communication or the improper attention to their emotional needs” (Juvé-Udina et al., 2014, p. 66). Nurses need to strive to adequately communicate with patients and understand their needs to increase patient satisfaction. If the patient feels misunderstood or that there is insufficient communication, these feelings “may affect the patients’ recovery, generate feelings of exclusion, frustration or loss of control, and negatively impact overall health outcomes” (Juvé-Udina et al., 2014, p. 66). By utilizing multiple different approaches to communication, including visual aids, nurses are able to more strategically tailor the care of their patients to maximize the effectiveness of care. Implementing this form of communication will only enhance the communication between patients and nurses.

Sustainability and Effectiveness: Is it Practical?

This useful communication tool is relatively low in cost. The materials needed to yield one flashcard booklet cost less than $5.00. These booklets will be retained on the unit and will be cleaned between patient uses by cleaning off the lamination; this will eliminate the need to have one printed for each patient. Rather, two booklets will be made readily available at the nurse’s station for nurses to utilize on either hall on the unit. Wear and tear is expected on these ring-bound booklets and eventual replacement is inevitable; however, they are projected to last several months and will, again, be cost effective and easy to replace. A document containing the booklet for reprinting will available through the nurse educator on the unit.

Not every patient will benefit from this form of communication. The nurse must evaluate the patient to determine if this is a form of communication that he or she deems implementable for the patient. Some patients may be in too much pain, be too drowsy, or be too confused to successfully comprehend and utilize the flashcards to communicate. The most ideal situations to apply the usage of these flashcards are situations where the patient is cognitively aware enough to look at the cards. These cards can also be effective in preventing the healthcare provider from becoming frustrated by trying to interpret what the patient’s nonverbal requests are; sometimes the patients may be making noises, gestures, and eye movements that suggest that they need something, with the words just not coming to their lips. These cards will also be effective in reducing patient frustration—patients will not have to utilize all of their energy to get one request out and other patients will not have to repeatedly hear the same question asked in an increasingly loud voice. Research studies have indicated that utilizing multiple different medias to communicate improves nursing care and ultimately increases overall patient satisfaction, too.

Conclusion

 Based on the research presented on the importance of effective communication, regardless of the situation, it can be deduced that communication between the patients and nurses dictates what kind of care the patient receives and the patient’s overall satisfaction with his or her healthcare. To help facilitate better communication with patients struggling to communicate, nurses will utilize the “Communication is Key Cards” that are available at the nurse’s station. The nurse will be able to show the patient a picture of a task or request with a corresponding phrase to elicit a yes or no response from the patient. This will be extremely useful on the surgical floor as many patients are still recovering from anesthesia, are in excruciating pain, or are taking medications that cause them to be slightly sedated or drowsy. This attainable flashcard communication packet will aid in the enablement of an efficient exchange of patient needs to the nurse.

References

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