

# Improving Delirium Recognition and Assessment: An Educational Intervention on a Neuroscience Unit

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## Abstract

**Background.** Delirium is a multifactorial, acute disturbance of attention associated with increased morbidity, mortality, and increased healthcare costs. Roughly seven million hospitalized patients develop delirium each year and over 60% go unrecognized by healthcare staff. The Confusion Assessment Method (CAM) is a validated tool for non-psychiatrically trained staff to successfully identify a delirious patient. The goal of this project was to increase nursing awareness of delirium, and encourage compliance with unit charting expectations related to the CAM.

**Methodology.** A quality improvement project was conducted on a 47-bed neuroscience unit over a six-month period of time. A pre-education survey was conducted to assess baseline delirium knowledge. An educational intervention consisting of an on-line educational module and an in-person educational presentation was conducted for all nurses. Following the educational phase a post-education survey was conducted. Chart data was reviewed at baseline and post-intervention.

**Results.** Post-education, CAM assessments every eight hours increased (18% to 39%) as well as CAM assessments within four hours of admission or transfer (32% to 50%). Improvements were seen in the rate of physician notification of positive CAM results (0% to 3%). There were also improvements in staff awareness of delirium. There was little improvement in the staff's self-reported confidence in ability to identify delirium and ability to use the CAM.

**Implications for practice.** The best form of treatment for delirium is prevention. Many delirium prevention treatments are nurse-driven and require nurses to be able to accurately assess patients for delirium. An education intervention was successful in raising nursing awareness of delirium and increasing compliance with charting expectations.