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.