

Improving Nursing Triage Accuracy: Quality Improvement

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According to Quality and Safety Education for Nurses (QSEN), Quality Improvement (QI) is the use of “data to monitor the outcomes of care processes and use improvement methods to design and test changes to continuously improve the quality and safety of health care systems” (QSEN Institute, 2020, Table 4). Quality improvement involves using evidence, scientific knowledge, methods, and differentiation between personal clinical experience and opinion from research (QSEN Institute, 2020). QI also requires one to value and appreciate the process of data gathering and process implementation. Nurses are to be active participants in data gathering, implementing nursing protocols and guidelines, and reading literature to increase personal knowledge and skills.

Triaging is a vital component of nursing care. It is the process in which a nurse gathers vital signs, health history, and other relevant information that nurses can then relay to the rest of the healthcare team. Triage is the process of prioritization of patients based on their current needs (Bijani & Khaleghi, 2019). The improvement of the triage process can significantly reduce adverse patient outcomes. Nurses everywhere can become more knowledgeable, competent, reliable, and consistent in their nursing practice due to an in-depth understanding of proper triage. As nurses become competent, the nursing profession becomes more trustworthy and more valued in society.

Article Summary

Introduction

Smith et al. (2022) is a quantitative research study that aims to “determine the accuracy of nurse-led triage in ECs in urban, private hospitals” (Smith et al., 2022). The study shows that 24.4% of patients were under-triaged and did not receive timely care. Under-triaging puts patients at risk of harm and death if nurses do not implement crucial protocols in time. Nurses are also at risk of disciplinary, financial, and legal consequences inaccurately triaged patients suffer harm. Hospitals and facilities may also suffer financial consequences and lose nursing credibility and licensure.

Overview

The article discussed in this paper uses mathematical methods that show the statistical significance of triaging errors in emergency centers. Quality improvement competency requires the use and understanding scientific methods to promote positive changes in the healthcare system. For nurses, the awareness of these errors is crucial to maintaining individual and facility licensure to continue their nursing practice.

Quality Improvement

Triaging is a universal nursing practice that is crucial to proper patient care. The article’s findings not only apply to acute nursing care facilities but in every direct patient care where triaging is part of the patient intake process. If a quality improvement effort is implemented for the triage process, facility standards will have to be changed to promote triaging accuracy. As nursing facilities implement the QI effort, data will have to be recorded, monitored, and evaluated bi-annually or more frequently as necessary. The recording-keeping process ensures that the quality improvement process is working. Nursing leadership and management can pursue legislation so that the process can be streamlined and implemented at a greater level of

jurisdiction with favorable and significant results. The research article shows that patients in emergency centers are being under-triaged and receiving untimely care (Smith et al., 2022). Improving triaging accuracy will result in timely patient care and satisfaction because they can receive the care they seek. It will also help nurses perform at the full scope of their practice and reduce risks of negligence due to untimely care. Consequently, facilities could allocate financial and medical resources better due to increased nursing skill accuracy.

Application to Nursing

Competencies, collaboration, and further research are currently lacking in triage systems. Bijani and Khaleghi (2019) conducted a qualitative study that explores the triaging challenges that nurses in emergency departments experience. Tam et al. (2018) suggest that emergency departments collaborate to promote triage accuracy.

Practice

The primary purpose of triage is the accurate prioritization of patients depending on their clinical condition and the seriousness of their distress (Bijani & Khaleghi, 2019). The safest state for patients in clinical settings is where the healthcare facility properly fulfills each patient's individual needs. In practice, the proper utilization of the triage system is essential to the patient's care coordination. Improper triage prevents specialized departments from giving good, timely care (Bijani & Khaleghi, 2019). Additionally, inaccurate triage results in the disruption of the emergency department's workflow, which ultimately results in delays in all aspects of the patient's care. Similarly, telephone triage systems can also suffer from inaccurate triaging. In a systematic review conducted by Lake et al. (2017), the researchers found that in 10 studies that used simulated high-risk patients, only 46% of triage was considered safe to adverse outcomes.

Education

Currently, each hospital has its guideline for triage. Different facilities and jurisdictions have varying needs and challenges that make the triage processes and policies different. Bijani and Khaleghi (2019) found that some participants in the study experienced difficulties because there was, among many, a lack of formal training and the absence of specific triage policies. The participants' experiences suggest a current need for a standardized guideline for triaging patients and a better understanding of the triage system.

Research

There are multiple challenges that nurses, providers, and healthcare facilities must address when it comes to triaging. Tam et al. (2018) state that there was "a very limited number of research studies on triage training" (paragraph 25). Research needs to focus more on exploring and determining ways to improve the accuracy of the triage system. Tam et al. (2018) suggest that emergency departments can collaborate. Collaboration between facilities can be effective in identifying problems in the triage system. Emergency and non-emergency departments can collaborate through problem identification to find sustainable and practical solutions to the triage system's challenges.

Conclusion

Quality Improvement (QI) uses "data to monitor the outcomes of care processes and use improvement methods to design and test changes to continuously improve the quality and safety of health care systems" (QSEN Institute, 2020, Table 4). QI seeks to improve data collection methods, assessment, clinical development, and research appreciation. As part of this effort, the exploration of triage issues and challenges is required to improve the healthcare system. Patient

outcomes highly depend on nurses accurately triaging patients, especially in emergency departments. The nursing profession becomes more competent and trustworthy due to the development of accurate, reliable, and consistent assessments. The increase in triage accuracy is essential to the nursing profession's contribution to alleviating suffering, reducing financial burdens on patients and institutions, and improving the community's health.

References

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