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Establishing Skilled Communication as a Core Competency for Hemodialysis Nurses & Technicians

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The American Association of Critical Care Nurses Healthy Work Environment (HWE) Standards were endorsed by the American Nephrology Nurses Association in 2006 to show the importance of working collaboratively to improve the environments in which nurses' work.

Our Level I Trauma hospital-based acute hemodialysis unit adopted HWE standards into the unit's scope of service. As a quality initiative, dialysis leadership presented HWE standards at staff meetings to improve patient care and establish best practices.

Background information included Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) survey scores and how they are tied to reimbursement (October 2012). A Press Ganey study (2013) stated performance on the "Communication with Nurses" dimension strongly influences four other "Patient Experience of Care" dimensions within the value-based purchasing framework. The hemodialysis patient experience would also lend to positive HCAHPS scores and position the hospital to successfully meet the goals of CMS' Triple Aim and the National Quality Strategy. According to Joint Commission (June 2013), more than 65% of hospitals sentinel events list communication among the top three causes. Thus, dialysis nurse and technician communications are essential for a positive hemodialysis patient experience.

Several dialysis best practices were established focusing on the HWE Standards "skilled communication" and "true collaboration". First, the care team began using SBAR (Situation/Background/Assessment/Recommendation). Using SBAR builds a strong "marriage" between the hemodialysis nurse and technician team for each patient. Next, consistent and purposeful 30 minute rounding including monitor runs with patient interaction to assure patient safety. Also, use of scripts, dialysis nurse calling post-dialysis report to the floor nurse, and the technician calling telemetry upon unit arrival and discharge. Last, hiring dialysis staff who exhibit strong interpersonal skills, and providing skills training in our annual review day.

Ongoing reinforcement to foster collaboration between the dialysis nurse and technician is needed to sustain a HWE. Thus, communication as a core competency for the hemodialysis care team will have the greatest impact on the overall patient's dialysis experience.

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