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NICHE SOLUTION #45 • 2015

DEMENTIA COMMUNICATION SKILLS: AN IOWA MODEL EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE (EBP) PROJECT

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PROBLEM: Staff were feeling stressed and uncomfortable when communicating with patients with dementia.

SOLUTION: Dementia communication education program to help lower stress levels.

Problem Identified Staff on the geriatric unit at MedStar Washington Hospital Center were feeling stressed and uncomfortable when communicating with older adult patients with dementia. The question for nursing staff on the geriatric medical/surgical unit was: “what would be the effect of implementing dementia communication education on nursing satisfaction with the identified problem?”



Nurses Improving Care for Healthsystem Elders

Solution Formulated The nurses believed that lowering stress levels would increase staff satisfaction and improve patient outcomes. A dementia communication education program helped achieve this goal.

Dementia patients have specific communication needs. Research by the project team uncovered strategies demonstrating positive effects on communication with dementia patients.

The education program included a “Do’s” and “Don’ts” tool for communication with dementia patients. Staff integrated strategies from this tool into daily practice. Also, posters with helpful tips were placed throughout the unit.

NICHE Role The NICHE Geriatric Resource Nurse (GRN) core curriculum is designed for use by those at NICHE sites who train nurses in best practices for hospitalized older adults. GRNs are the foundation of system-wide improvement to achieve positive outcomes for hospitalized older adults. The NICHE program, available to hospitals internationally, offers evidence-based, interdisciplinary approaches to promote improved care for the hospitalized older adult. GRNs can perform assessments similar to the one described in this Solution story to understand the characteristics of the older adults at their hospitals.

Evaluation/Results Pre- and post-surveys were conducted gauging perceptions on communication with dementia patients. The post-survey data revealed an increase in comfort level and staff satisfaction. Also, there were increases in “would recommend” and “overall rating” of the geriatric medical/surgical floor in HCAHPS scores.

For more information

1. Davis, B. H., MacLagan, M., Karakostas, T., Hsiang, S., & Shenk, D. (2011). Watching what you say: Walking and conversing in dementia. *Topics in Geriatric Rehabilitation, 27* (4), 268-277.
2. Miller, C.A. (2008). Communication difficulties in hospitalized older adults with dementia. *American Journal of Nursing, 108* (3), 58-66.
3. National Institute on Aging (2013). Acute Hospitalization and Alzheimer's Disease: A special kind of care. Retrieved June 2013 from <http://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication/acutehospitalization-and-alzheimers-disease>
4. Savundranayagam, M. Y., Ryan, E. B., Anas, A. P., & Orange, J. B. (2007). Communication and dementia: Staff perceptions of conversational strategies. *Clinical Gerontologist, 31* (2), 47-63.
5. Williams, K. N., Herman, R., Gajewski, B., & Wilson, K. (2009). Elderspeak communication: Impact on dementia care. *American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease & Other Dementia's, 24* (1), 11-20.
6. Varner, J. M. (2012) Managing Communications and Behavioral Challenges in Dementia. *The Alabama Nurse*, March April May, 5-8.

NICHE-related resources

1. NICHE Geriatric Resource Nurse Core Curriculum 2012. Dementia module. (Available at NICHE Knowledge Center, accessed via www.nicheprogram.org)
2. NICHE Online Connect Webinar: Creating Smooth Transitions for Your Patients with Dementia. (Available at the NICHE website, accessed via www.nicheprogram.org.)
3. NICHE Online Connect Webinar: Implementing Long Term Care Advisory Standards for an Alzheimer's/Dementia Program at The Lighthouse, Brick, NJ. (Available at the NICHE website, accessed via www.nicheprogram.org.)
4. NICHE Online Connect Webinar: Managing Behavioral Disturbances in Patients with Dementia. (Available at the NICHE website, accessed via www.nicheprogram.org.)
5. NICHE Online Connect Webinar: Oral Health - Dementia. (Available at the NICHE website, accessed via www.nicheprogram.org.)
6. Boltz, M., Capezuti, E., Fulmer, T., & Zwicker, D. (eds.) (2012). *Evidence-Based Geriatric Nursing Protocols for Best Practice* (4th ed.). Chapter 10, Dementia. New York: Springer Publishing Company. (Available at <http://www.springerpub.com/product/9780826171283#.UKvz600e80p>)

About NICHE

NICHE (Nurses Improving Care for Healthsystem Elders) is an international program designed to help hospitals and healthcare organizations improve care of older adults. The vision of NICHE is for all patients 65-and-over to be given sensitive and exemplary care. The mission of NICHE is to provide principles and tools to stimulate a change in the culture of healthcare facilities to achieve patient-centered care for older adults. NICHE, based at NYU College of Nursing, consists of hospitals and healthcare facilities in the U.S., Canada, Singapore, and Bermuda. For more information visit nicheprogram.org.

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