SAFE Guidelines for Optimal Care

During the assessment and intervention of the stroke survivor, and as recommendations are made regarding discharge plans, safety is key.

The following SAFE guidelines provide the foundation for this learning module and will be used throughout the program.

- Sharpen your observation skills
- Acquire necessary handling skills
- Follow medical guidelines
- Enhance the environment

Sharpen Your Observation Skills
Continually observe the patient and the patient’s environment as you work. Sharp observation skills are fundamental for accurate assessment and intervention of stroke survivors, or any patient in the acute care setting. Sharp observation skills can even prevent medical emergencies.

Acquire Necessary Handling Skills
In order for you and your patient to be safe, you must have good handling skills. Safe and effective handling skills are demonstrated throughout this program. If you are ever unsure of your ability to manage a patient, stop and get assistance. Never put yourself or your patient in an unsafe situation.

Follow Medical Guidelines
Your knowledge of the patient’s medical condition, medical management, precautions and contraindications must be current and up to date. Know your hospital’s protocols when working in the intensive care and acute care units. Check with the nurse or doctor if you have any questions.

Enhance the Environment
The environment includes all therapeutic equipment, assistive devices, monitors, IV poles, call lights for nurses and even hospital beds. Use all items safely and carefully. Follow any specific guidelines established by your hospital. Be sure to add any adaptive equipment that can enhance safety for both you and your patient.

In order to effectively follow these SAFE guidelines, it is important to maintain a high level of competency while working in the acute care setting. Competency requires excellence in two areas, knowledge and skill, in order to provide the safest medical care for stroke survivors.
Providing Optimal Care: Increasing Your Knowledge and Skill in the Acute Care Setting

Acute care is a dynamic environment. New medical therapies and procedures are adopted on a regular basis. Therapists must continually increase their knowledge related to the medical conditions of all patients on their case load.

There are several ways therapists can acquire additional knowledge, specific to their patient, in the hospital setting.

Review Medical Records
Medical records are important legal documents containing confidential information about a specific patient’s status and care. The medical record or chart is designed to communicate important information to team members caring for a particular patient.

Attend Team Rounds
Formal meetings between team members provide excellent opportunities to gather and share information. As members of the team report their findings, questions are asked and discussions take place enabling everyone to obtain critical information necessary for making informed decisions related to patient care. Typically the patient’s physician, nurse, physical therapist, occupational therapist, speech-language pathologist, social worker and discharge planner attend rounds.

Participate in Informal Communication
Some of the most important information related to patient care is gathered during informal communication. Essential information is often learned while speaking with nursing staff, social workers, chaplains or other therapists in passing. Family members provide invaluable information regarding the stroke survivor’s prior level of function, helping therapists determine recommendations for discharge placement and any further therapy. Therapists with sharp observation and listening skills become adept at gaining knowledge through informal communication.

Improve Therapeutic Skills in the Acute Care Setting
The key to safe treatment in the acute care setting is the therapist’s ability to observe and assess the patient before, during and after treatment. Through careful observation therapists are able to determine whether their intervention has been effective or not.

Therapists often learn best from another therapist, a mentor or a clinical specialist. Make the necessary adjustments in your schedule to observe other clinicians and learn the necessary handling skills for safe and effective care of your stroke survivors.

Continuing Education
Academic training and daily interactions in the acute environment are not enough to keep abreast of the cutting edge in acute care. Therapists must be committed to increasing their knowledge and skill through continuing education. Continuing education may include attending conferences or seminars, participating in grand rounds, receiving departmental in-service training and staying current with the latest literature.