



FoNS Improvement Insights

Embedding Excellent Nutrition Care Practices in an Acute Hospital Ward

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Project background

It has been widely published that meeting the nutritional requirements of patients improves outcomes in terms of physical health and length of stay in hospital. The Care Quality Commission has given a clear indication to hospital trusts of its nutritional standards, and the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence states that the delivery of nutritional care should be well organised to allow for individual nutritional needs to be met. The Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool (MUST) is a national tool developed and validated by the British Association of Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition which is used to identify adult patients at risk of malnutrition. Patients are screened on admission to hospital and rescreened throughout their stay. This assessment allows a plan of care to be developed to address patients nutritional needs as required.

Whilst Nottingham University Hospitals proactively embraced nutritional care initiatives, including introducing MUST, on-going audit results suggestive that good nutritional practice did not appear to be consistently embedded at ward level. In order to develop a nutritional standard and understand the issues, the project team carried out focus groups with a group of ward sisters who were undertaking the Royal College of Nursing leadership course and a group of nutrition link nurses. Information from the groups identified that training needs of staff, roles and responsibilities and mealtime practices were issues that needed to be addressed. It was agreed that a 28 bedded male acute respiratory ward would take part in a project to improve nutritional care.

Aim and objectives of the project

The aim of the project was to provide a measurable improvement in the standard and consistency of patients nutritional care and experience on one acute hospital ward. The objectives of the project were to:

- Collect information about current ward nutrition practices
- Facilitate any nutritional improvements required on the ward
- Evaluate the effectiveness of any planned changes

Key activities and outcomes from the project

The project was divided into three stages based on the objectives and a number of methods were used within each of these stages.

- Collect information about current ward nutrition practices
The aim of this stage was to establish a baseline of the nutritional care practices on the ward and included; an audit of MUST screening by the dietetic department; observation of five mealtimes; a staff questionnaire to understand attitudes to nutritional needs (n=18); and discussions with significant staff and service user groups.

- Facilitate any nutritional improvements required on the ward
To achieve this all the nursing staff were enabled to attend two off-ward workshops, which involved a values clarification exercise to identify good nutritional practice; process mapping of existing mealtime practice and the identification of potential changes to the mealtimes. At the end of the last workshop, three ideal processes had been developed by staff for each of the mealtimes and the ward sister developed a step by step guide to each of the new processes. A “go live” date was agreed with staff and the project team worked with the ward nursing team to get the new mealtime processes up and running.

- Evaluate the effectiveness of any planned changes
The audits from phase one were repeated after three months to measure improvements in practice. Improvements in practice included improved screening practices using the MUST tool, improved documentation of nutritional care, and a greater level of involvement and interaction of both registered and non registered nurses in the mealtime care of patients. Since the initial data collection, the Essence of Care Food and Drink benchmark was also rescored as part of a trust-wide initiative; nutrition metrics are now measured monthly and displayed on the nursing and midwifery dashboard. The success of this project has been shared trust-wide and there are plans to roll out this initiative to other wards within the hospital.

Implications for practice:

- The active engagement and support of the nursing ward team and in particular the ward sister was key to the project success and is a major consideration when implementing ward based change
- Thinking time away from the ward for nursing staff enabled them to consider good practice and to identify change themselves rather than it be imposed externally
- The partnership working between the nursing staff and food service assistants to enable the changes in practice was very positive

A full project report including references can be accessed from: <http://fons.org/library/report-details.aspx?nstd=26950>

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