



FoNS Improvement Insights

Improving the Patient Journey within a Minor Injuries Unit

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Project background

Care delivery to patients attending Accident and Emergency (A&E) units in the UK has significantly changed over recent years, due mainly to the expansion and diversity of nursing roles, the introduction of the European Working Time Directive as well as the Modernisation of Medical Careers. In response, to modernise team working within A&E in NHS Lanarkshire (NHSL), a Minor Injury Nurse Treatment Service (MINTS) programme was developed to prepare experienced A&E nurses to become more autonomous in their roles and expand their sphere of practice to assess, treat and discharge patients from the minor injuries unit as well as meet Scottish Government performance targets. However, different styles of leadership, culture and management within A&E units in NHSL reduced the ability of nurses to work autonomously and in some areas the MINTS nurses reverted to a medical model of healthcare resulting in poor minor injury performance figures.

Aim and objectives of the project

The aim of the project was to improve the patient journey by enhancing the performance of MINTS nursing staff, by developing effective and sustainable professional and team relationships. To achieve this aim the objectives of the project were to:

- Develop a cohesive minor injury team by improving professional relationships and workplace culture
- Monitor and improve MINTS performance figures
- Gather baseline information to understand patient experience, and use this information to implement necessary changes to improve the patient experience and communication methods utilised within the unit
- Audit current documentation practice and implement required changes to ensure compliance with NMC and GMC standards

Key activities and outcomes from the project

A number of methods were employed to achieve the intended outcomes of the project. These included a values clarification exercise, a patient experience questionnaire and a review of the evidence from local and national audits including a MINTS documentation audit.

The values clarification questionnaire was distributed electronically to a cross section of staff including A&E consultants (n=14:24).

Emerging themes included: improving the patient journey; teamwork and leadership; management and staffing issues; medical input; training and education and differing staff agendas. Whilst these themes informed the focus for the project, an overarching theme was the need to develop professional relationships with robust leadership and management as key to the future success of the MINTS project within the A&E unit.

The patient experience questionnaire was distributed over a two-day period (n=48). This identified that patient information and communication processes within the waiting area were inefficient and misleading for both patients and carers arriving and waiting to be seen. In particular, patients were not aware of a 'streaming process' separating minor and major patients within the A&E unit or movement through the unit. Based on this a communication group was formed that focused on utilising the plasma screen TV to inform patients of waiting times and offer relevant and up to date information as well as the use of posters explaining the streaming processes between minor and major areas of the A&E.

Internal auditing of A&E records revealed poor written communication. This led to the piloting of structured case records that improved team communication which was the most time consuming aspect of the project.

Over a one year period, the number of patients seen and discharged from minor injuries by MINTS nurses increased by almost 50%. There was also a significant improvement in team working with nursing and medical staff working more cohesively. Professional respect between senior nurses and consultants in A&E improved dramatically evidenced by collaborative working and the on-going implementation of structured case records.

Implications for practice:

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- The values clarification exercise allowed staff to recognise the views and concerns of others in the team and develop a shared vision for the new service
- The patient questionnaire proved to be an effective way of gaining their views
- Having a clear project focus and the commitment of a small group of enthusiastic staff enabled the project aim to be achieved, however it was recognised that wider stakeholder involvement would have been beneficial
- The practice development methods used highlighted other service improvements that needed to be made

A full project report including references can be accessed from: <http://www.fons.org/library/report-details.aspx?nstd=26953>

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