Reducing Falls with Injury: Leveraging the Electronic Health Record to Improve Patient Safety While Transforming Practice

Norfolk General Hospital
600 Gresham Drive
Norfolk, Virginia 23507

Purpose

The purpose of the project was to reduce the rate of falls with injury at Sentara Norfolk General Hospital. This project utilized a collaborative nursing process to improve visual alerts within the electronic health record (EHR), resulting in better assessment, intervention, and outcomes.

Significance

A review of the literature reveals that between 2 and 17% of patients in the hospital will fall. Up to 50% of those falls result in injury. Additionally, falls are costly. In the Sentara Health System the average fall with injury claim costs the system $204,530.

Strategy and Implementation

- Implementation of EHR in March '09
- Strategies were added to reduce falls with injury including:
  - Nationally developed, evidenced based clinical practice guidelines implemented
  - History of falls added to the patient header
  - Pink banner incorporated to enhance interdisciplinary communication on patient summary
  - Patient header shaded pink for high fall risk scores
  - Fall risk score visible on patient list as discrete property
  - FYI alert for patients with history of falls
- Staff nurses developed and evaluated these improvements through falls performance improvement committees and nursing user groups.

Evaluation

Following the implementation of strategies within the EHR, Sentara Norfolk General Hospital demonstrated a 14% decrease in their fall with injury rate (0.73 to 0.63 per 1,000 patient days).

Falls with Injury

Implications

Evidence based clinical content embedded in the EHR facilitates the prevention of falls with injury. Staff are empowered to suggest, implement, and evaluate tools for fall prevention to improve patient safety through enhanced situational awareness and elevated professional practice.

Authors

Stephanie Jackson, DNP, RN
Sarah Darwin, MSN, RN
Greg Hafer, MSN, RN
Sharyn Sizemore, MSN, RN