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Unveiling Variability in Our Fall Risk Practices

Kristine Harper

Medical University of South Carolina, USA

Successful Fall Prevention Programs have a standardized assessment tool for evaluating the patient's risk of falling. A large academic medical center implemented the Morse Fall Scale for the adult population and the Cumming's Pediatric Fall Assessment Scale for the pediatric population. Variability and inaccuracy in scoring of fall risk in both populations were noted during investigation of patient falls. A needs assessment survey was developed and included three sections: Participant demographics, population based risk assessment knowledge and fall prevention strategies, and participant self-assessment. A total of 501 nurses responded to the survey across the organization. Analysis of staff knowledge related to assessment of fall risk identified two areas of confusions: intravenous (IV) access and secondary diagnosis. Both fall assessment tools increase the patient's risk score if they have IV access, regardless of its use type. Additionally, many of the nurses caring for adult patients understood that secondary diagnosis was any other active diagnosis listed in the medical record and scored the patient appropriately. The survey also demonstrated common misunderstanding of evidenced based guidelines for high risk fall prevention in both the pediatric and adult population. Areas of opportunity that were identified; arm the bed exit alarm or chair alarm regardless of visitors present and remain within arm's reach while a patient is toileting. Conclusion: Patient falls in the hospital remains the most common adverse event and can result in injury, increase length of stay, and decreased overall mobility as well as lead to other complications. Risk screening and plan of care are keys to success in any fall prevention program. However, if the risk screening and prevention strategies are not consistently applied there are opportunities for improvement. Validation of inter-rater reliability on fall risk assessment tools on an ongoing basis is essential to ensure that nurses have the knowledge to keep patients safe.