Purposeful Visits for Hospitalized Elderly Patients: Program Impact on Orientation, Agitation and Mood

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Introduction/Background

Hospitalized elderly patients are vulnerable: Can experience isolation, depression, delirium and disorientation. (Inouye, 1999)

• They can feel cut off from normal routines and social support.

• Alterations in the patient's emotional and cognitive state can impede their medical progress and recovery.

• Programs designed to reduce the incidence of delirium in elderly hospitalized patients employ re-orientation techniques and efforts to decrease isolation. (Vidan, 2009)

Patient centered care can be a non-pharmacological management strategy when caring for elderly demented patients. (Allen & Close, 2010)

The University of Colorado Hospital is a 375 bed tertiary care hospital located in Aurora, Colorado. Provides patient and family centered care.

The ACE unit is a thirteen bed medical unit dedicated to the “acute care of the elderly”.

Interdisciplinary team consists of MD’s, nurses, pharmacists, physical, occupational and recreational therapists as well as a large pool of volunteers.

Volunteers are a valuable resource and could extend the scope of service for specific therapeutic recreation programs.

Methods & Materials

Upon selection of volunteers, our recreational therapist held individual educational sessions aimed at improving their communication and active listening skills.

Utilized the Peterson Gunn Therapeutic Recreation Service Model. (Peterson & Gunn, 1987)

This model delineates role of volunteer in therapist.

Volunteers do not initiate any therapeutic modalities.

Model helped to established boundaries for volunteers.

Patient centered care can be a non-pharmacological management strategy when caring for elderly demented patients. (Allen & Close, 2010)

Secondary goals were to assist patients in identifying areas.

A basic understanding of the English language.

The ability to tolerate a five minute interaction.

The lack of aggressive behaviors.

A basic understanding of the English language.

Were seen as vulnerable in some way; frail, emarking a prolonged illness, isolated or slightly confused.

Trained volunteers met with patients one on one, introduced themselves and asked for permission to talk with patients regarding their recreational activity interests.

Volunteers utilized active listening and conversational skills to look for Go/No-Go Signals.

Conversations focused on past and present recreational activities, life events and relationships.

Visit times varied from a few minutes to an hour in length.

Upon completion of visit, the volunteers asked and recorded patients' perception of the visits.

Nurses and Volunteers also were asked to assess the impact of the visit.

Questions/Purpose of the Study

The goal of the purposeful visitation program was to demonstrate the potential to positively enhance the mood, orientation and level of calmness in a group of elderly patients through education and training of volunteers.

Secondary goals were to assist patients in identifying activities that will help decrease boredom, loneliness, depression and agitation and to increase patients understanding and value of participating in therapeutic activities.

Hypothesis

Purposeful visits were intended to improve the patient’s subjective hospital experience and diminish depression, agitation and disorientation which interfere with goals of hospitalization.

Results

Evaluation Scale:

A 5 point scale was used to assess the changes on patient's mood, orientation and level of calmness:

A score of 1 or 2 indicated worsening

A score of 0 represented no change

A score of 1 - 2 signified improvement in one or more areas.

Outcomes

98 patients received a structured visit by a trained volunteer over a seven month period.

62 post visit evaluations were completed by all three participants: the patient, the nurse and the volunteer.

93% of the patients reported they enjoyed their purposeful visitation.

Patient Behavior

Volunteer Perception Nurses Perception

Conclusions/Practice Implications

All three patient domains were reported as improved by volunteers and nurses.

Volunteers rated improvement in mood significantly higher (p<.005) than nurses.

Mood rates as significantly improved over orientation and level of calmness by both volunteers (p<.005) and nurses (p<.001).

Limitations of Study included:

• Short length of stay

• Unexpected interruptions

• Inability to correlate this intervention with hospital patient satisfaction scores

• Variation and inconsistencies in volunteers due to turnover

• Language barriers.

Implications for Practice

Volunteers are a valuable resource and could extend the scope of service for specific therapeutic recreation programs.

The purposeful visitation Program was shown to benefit patients and staff using a patient centered, interdisciplinary approach.

Future Endeavors:

Volunteers are a valuable resource and could extend the scope of service for specific therapeutic recreation programs.

The purposeful visitation Program was shown to benefit patients and staff using a patient centered, multidisciplinary approach.

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References


JAGS 2006; 57: 2029–2036.
