PROBLEM: In the summer of 2007, staff nurses communicated shift-to-shift information via a tape recorded report. We identified the following problems with this handoff method: 1) long taped report that focused on past events rather than anticipating patient care needs, 2) little or no direct discussion with the patient, and 3) missed opportunities for teaching and fostering critical thinking with novice nurses at the bedside.

EVIDENCE: A workgroup of staff nurses and managers from our 3 medical-surgical units and the emergency room reviewed current literature about shift handoff processes.

STRATEGY: The workgroup met twice monthly in summer, 2007, to reach consensus on bedside handoff concepts and to design the components of this process. Additionally, the group created scenarios to educate staff about the new process.

PRACTICE CHANGE: In fall, 2007, the handoff workgroup recommended to the Nursing Practice Council the bedside handoff process consisting of 8 components: 1) RN/patient assignments; 2) charge nurse unit overview; 3) patient preview information using a continuously updated excel document; 4) RN to RN handoff at the bedside that includes discussion with the patient; 5) on-coming RN clarification; 6) LPN and UAP assignments; 7) mid-shift update (optional); and, 8) end of shift verbal report by LPNs/UAPs to RN.

EVALUATION: Unit RNs completed pre- and post-implementation surveys to evaluate staff perceptions of the change.

RESULTS: 79% of respondents in the post-survey indicated that the shift handoff process was somewhat or significantly better than the previous process. There was an increase from 50% to 70% of respondents indicating that the amount of time for shift handoff was “about right”.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Although units may make specific changes in the handoff process, it is important to periodically monitor nurses during the actual handoff process to ensure that staff nurses are complying with the basic components of the process.

LESSONS LEARNED: Involving staff nurses in the initial planning of the handoff process helped to gain support from their co-workers.

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