ICU Nurses' Readiness to Discuss Palliative Care
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Problem: Many nurses are not ready to discuss palliative care issues based on a lack of knowledge, support and experience. Patients and families, therefore, lack the necessary support for facilitating decision-making regarding palliative care in the acute care setting.

Evidence: Much has been written about patient perceptions of death and palliative care, however little information exists about the impact of nurses’ attitudes and perceptions on palliative care discussions. Despite the Self Determination Act of 1990, little education on palliative care decision-making occurs with elderly patients. More than 75% of adults over age 65 will suffer from at least one chronic condition between the years 2005-2030, yet co-morbidities and recurrent hospitalizations are not necessarily considered when determining the aggressiveness of ICU care1.

Nurses often coordinate communication between the physician and patient’s family; however clarity is lacking regarding the responsibility for educating geriatric patients on advanced life choices. Since only 3% of nursing schools offer end-of-life curricula2, nurses may not have received the training or experience to provide effective end-of-life care.

Strategy:
- Pre-intervention survey
- Gained permission to use copyrighted online continuing education (CE) presentation, “Providing Excellent Palliative Care”
- Distributed online CE presentation to select units
- Post-intervention survey
- Findings summarized

Practice Change:
- Project findings presented to hospital Palliative Care team
- CE offering distributed hospital-wide

Evaluation:
Project effectiveness was measured by comparing pre and post-implementation data.

Results:
Despite a low response rate on the post-education survey, findings clearly suggest the need for further general and hospital-specific palliative care education. Nurses consistently identified key barriers to initiating a palliative care consultation. Greater than 90% of respondents requested palliative care training.

Recommendations:
Provide additional interdisciplinary education.
Evaluate hospital-specific consultation process.

Lessons Learned:
Collaboration with key stakeholders is critical to project success.
The effectiveness of project is compromised by survey burden among staff nurse participants.

References:
1 Fact Sheet, Institute of Medicine, 2008
2 Bushinski et al, 2007