Guideline for Communicating with Unresponsive and Non-Verbal ICU Patients
Rowena Chona O. Sano, RN
Harris Health System
Teji Arackal, Linda Bobby, Rajani Kokkodil, Ancy Vallavanatt

Problem:
Nurses working in critical care settings often provide care for patients who are not communicative due to brain injury and/or other medical diagnoses. Nurses have responsibility to provide care that is appropriate to patients’ condition and limitations to promote positive patient outcomes, improve customer satisfaction, and comply with The Joint Commission requirements for improving nurse-patient communications.

Evidence:
Current best practice recommendations support that implementation of a communication practice guideline and providing availability of alternative and augmentative communication tools has potential to improve communication between nurses and unresponsive/non-verbal patients and their family members.

Strategy:
A team of Neurosurgical Care Unit (NICU) nurses used Evidence-Based Practice process steps to gather, appraise, and implement best practice recommendations. Identified best practices were used to formulate a practice guideline.

Practice Change:
A communication guideline draft was presented to NICU nurses for evaluation and input prior to submitting the document for organizational approval. A box containing alternative and augmentative communication tools, such as small dry erase boards, pictures, and alphabets, was placed on the unit for the nurses to use, depending on the patient’s communication needs.

Evaluation:
Nurses were provided education and completed a pre and post intervention survey.

Results:
Ninety percent (90%) of the NICU nurses (n=41) completed the pre-intervention survey, and were provided orientation on the communication guideline. Only 17 (41%) completed the post-intervention survey. Feedback from nurses and families showed that use of communication tools provided by the EBP Team were found to be very helpful in communicating with non-verbal patients.

Recommendations:
Implementation of a communication practice guideline and providing availability of alternative and augmentative communication tools has potential to improve communication between nurses and unresponsive/non-verbal patients and their families.
Lessons Learned:
Implementation of the communication practice guideline and providing communication tools has supported effective communication between nurses and unresponsive/nonverbal patients. A small grant application has been submitted for funding to place communication toolboxes on all critical care units within the organization.

Bibliography:


