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J Rush Pierce Jr
D Kearney
E Cumbler

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DEVELOPMENT OF A POST-FALL MULTIDISCIPLINARY CHECKLIST TO EVALUATE THE IN-PATIENT FALL

J Rush Pierce Jr, MD, MPH1,2, Deirdre Kearney RN, MSN2, Ethan Cumbler MD3
1Section of Hospital Medicine, University of New Mexico School of Medicine, Albuquerque; 2University of New Mexico Hospital, Albuquerque; 3Section of Hospital Medicine, University of Colorado School of Medicine, Denver

BACKGROUND

Falls suffered by hospitalized patients are important reportable events. Approximately 4 - 6 % of inpatient falls result in serious injury. Recurrent falls or delayed recognition of injury can harm patients and represent a medico-legal risk. In 2010, our tertiary-care academic medical center reviewed current practice regarding falls prevention and assessment in order to develop a comprehensive falls prevention program. The committee found that there was no consistent practice in the assessment by nurses or physicians of inpatients who had fallen, either for injury or for conditions which might have led to the fall. A new systematic checklist for evaluation of the hospital faller was developed by a team consisting of nurses, hospitalists, and a medical unit director. We wished to develop an evidence-based multi-disciplinary checklist to facilitate evaluation, implementation of secondary prevention interventions and documentation following a hospital fall.

POST - FALL ASSESSMENT TOOL

The hospitalist and the general medical unit director reviewed relevant literature, consulted national experts, and drafted a multidisciplinary checklist, the UNMH Post-Fall/Huddle Tool, to be used by nurses and physicians in post-fall patient evaluation. The checklist was reviewed and revised with further input from key stakeholders including hospitalists, housestaff, and the adult Medical/Surgical Shared Governance Committee. It was implemented as part of a comprehensive falls prevention program 3 month pilot. The checklist prompts a three step process:

1. an initial 7-item assessment by nursing staff to determine factors which would necessitate immediate evaluation by cross-covering physicians versus deferring evaluation to the primary team;
2. a 5-item focused physical examination to be performed by a physician to assess the likelihood of injury and suggested diagnostic tests based on this examination; and
3. an interdisciplinary face-to-face meeting between the evaluating physician and nurse to review 7 specific possible precipitating events and implement potential interventions.

The UNMH Post-Fall/Huddle Tool will be adapted into the electronic health record after pilot completion and evaluation. An educational presentation about falls and how to use the checklist was developed for residents and hospitalists. Use of the checklist was implemented in November, 2010. To date, nurses and residents report that the checklist is easy to use and that it facilitates a timely, multidisciplinary evaluation of patients who have fallen in the hospital.

FINDINGS FROM PILOT IMPLEMENTATION

1. Improved confidence among nurses and residents evaluating in-patients who had fallen.
2. More consistent evaluation and treatment of in-patients who have fallen.
3. Better documentation of this evaluation.
4. Improved communication between physicians and nurses.
5. Desire to move from paper-based systems to an electronic health record.

REFERENCES