

Consumers' perspectives on the 'Are You Worried' escalation of care process.

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Introduction

Patient and family activated escalations systems have been implemented throughout Australia as a safeguard for improving patient safety and empowering patients, families and carers to be active participants in their health care.

The study was designed to assess consumer and clinician satisfaction, attitudes and understanding of the three step, consumer activated, escalation process at Epworth HealthCare entitled "Are You Worried".

Aims

The purpose of phase one of this study was to determine:

1. Consumer awareness of the "Are You Worried" escalation process; if the current method for disseminating the information is appropriate and, to identify the key information that consumers would need in order to use the "Are You Worried" escalation process during an acute care admission.
2. Clinician perceptions of the current "Are You Worried" escalation process and to ascertain their views on how the current process could be improved.

Methodology

An exploratory descriptive qualitative study was undertaken that involved conducting focus group interviews with consumers and key staff members.

Participants were invited from across Epworth HealthCare acute care wards.

The study population consisted of patients who had been admitted to the acute wards for a period of greater than 24 hours, relatives visiting these patients, staff members included Hospital Coordinators, Nurse Unit Managers, and clinical nurses.

The semi-structured interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Content and thematic analysis was performed to identify key themes.

Results

Seven consumers and twenty two staff members, from five acute wards, participated in the study. Six themes were identified.

1. Awareness of the "Are You Worried" escalation process

Hospital Coordinator - "Its very passive, we don't advertise it"

Patient - "I can see it (poster) on the wall"

Patient - "I have had it pointed out to me, but when I come in here I'm known as an old hand, it's not like I'm the totally new guy on the block and therefore they don't go through the established process"

Hospital Coordinator - "I don't think they are informed. I think there are signs up"

Hospital Coordinator - "The advertising of this service isn't out there enough"

Nurse - "My understanding would be very vague. I don't quite know enough about it to use myself"

2. Communication of the "Are You Worried" process

Nurse Unit Manager - "We don't bring it up, purely because we don't have the time to sit there and talk about everything with them"

Hospital Coordinator - "I wonder if there's a conflict inside the nurses. They probably don't want to say there is a "Are You Worried" system because they might fear it coming back to bite them"

Patient - "I would go to the head nurse or the doctor and complain"

3. Timing of communicating the "Are You Worried" process

Hospital Coordinator - "I think most appropriately is probably letting people know on admission. So maybe it needs to be part of the admission pack that people receive"

Patient - "There's so much information given out and things change all the time, so you have to be really careful of information overload"

Patient - "It needs to be reinforced in another day or two"

Relative - "Maybe it's something you reinforce more than once"

4. Perception of the consumer role in escalating deterioration

Nurse - "It's for them, if they feel their concerns are not being met by the nurses, they can escalate further"

Nurse - "If a family was really worried and they feel the care team aren't seeing that or understanding that, or doing anything about it, it's like their back-up for them to get a second look at things"

Patient - "If I had a sense that something in the system was failing me or something like that, I would talk to the Nurse Unit Manager"

5. Complaints versus clinical need when using the "Are You Worried" process

Nurse - "I see it as clinical but I think the patients see it as not getting their bins changed"

Nurse - "I think they see it as a more are you worried about other things, other than clinical deterioration"

Hospital Coordinator - "I received a call about a family member not being in a private room"

Hospital Coordinator - "I'm not sure patients understand the difference"

6. Safety net for vulnerable patients

Patient - "You know if they are caught up with someone who is really ill, that it's understandable that sometimes they'll be away"

Patient - "I've always regarded those kind of things perhaps more for vulnerable, isolated people. Persons on their own, perhaps without hardly any family, nobody to talk to, to act as their advocate"

Patient - "I can't imagine it happening, because I've had wonderful, wonderful nurses"

Conclusions

The findings from phase one of the study identified gaps in knowledge and understanding of the "Are You Worried" escalation process for both staff and consumers.

Phase two involves the development of a survey to further expand on the themes identified in phase one.

Phase three will utilise the findings from phase two and will involve the implementation and evaluation of improvement strategies.