

New Territories West Cluster



Active interviews: Improved communication between relatives and health care team

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, patients and their relatives want to get more information about patients' condition. We often encounter situations that relatives request to see doctor to ask about the patients' condition, especially for elderly patients who may not communicate well. Occasionally, after patients were discharged, relatives still cannot know about patients' condition and arouse some misunderstandings with the health care team.

Good communication is viewed as an essential core clinical skill and an integral medical task [1, 2].

OBJECTIVE

We conducted a pilot study on active interview with relatives, aiming at improving communication with relatives, the standard of care and reducing potential misunderstandings.

METHOD

Meetings were held among doctors and nurses to understand the current situation and plan for the study. Two pilot wards (one male and one female) were involved. It was proposed that after getting verbal consent from patient, the admitting medical officer (MO) interviewed the accompanying relatives. The in-charge MO will also actively interview the relatives at least once before discharge, either by phone or face-to-face. They will mention the diagnosis, condition of patient and management plan and document it in the interview record sheet.

The nurses had a supplementary role to assist doctors to answer relatives' questions during visiting hours. The project was conducted for three weeks in November 2009 and evaluated to see whether it is feasible to carry out in the busy medical wards.

RESULT

Around 70% of the 220 patients' relatives were interviewed after patients' verbal consent, majority were done by the in-charge MO. According to the participating staff, the relatives were satisfied when they received information from the doctors.

Some doctors did not get used to record information in the interview record sheet initially, so the actual interview rate would be higher. There were some suggested improvements for this study, like installing more telephones in wards for contacting relatives.

Discussion

Through this pilot study, it proved that communication is necessary and it can enhance mutual understanding. Patients and relatives would be more satisfied when the health care team actively provided them information.

From staff's point of view, well documented communication records would be useful for on-call staff to take-up the cases more easily.

At the same time, the staff's workload would be increased, so the 70% compliance rate was a satisfactory figure. The nurses also have an assisting role in providing information to relatives during visiting hours.

CONCLUSION

Active communication can improve mutual understanding between health care team and patients and their relatives. The effort of the teamwork is the key of success.



Medical Officers interviewing relatives through telephone to explain patients' condition

REFERENCES

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