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A pilot study of enhanced training program for health care assistants in feeding patients with swallowing problem

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Introduction

Swallowing difficulty due to dysphagia is a prevalent problem in hospital and is associated with aspiration, poor nutritional status and psychosocial burden. The complications, particularly aspiration pneumonia, are one of the major causes of prolonged hospitalization and mortality. Therefore a safe delivery of care to patients by frontline staff is of paramount importance

Objectives

It is a quality improvement project (1)to raise the awareness and knowledge of health care assistants(HCAs) on swallowing problem and (2)to enhance their feeding techniques on dysphagic patients in order to avoid complications

Methodology

An interactive training program was designed by advanced practice nurses and speech therapist. It was carried out in neurological ward and stroke unit due to the high prevalence of dysphagia in these specialties. The program consisted of 2 parts. The first part was a teaching seminar with written assessment. A pre-test and post-test score were compared to evaluate the changes in knowledge. The second part was a bedside assessment of feeding techniques which was conducted 3 months after the first part in order to assess how well HCAs retained their knowledge in applying the skills clinically

Result

The pilot training program was conducted to 21 HCAs between Aug 2014 and Jan 2015. The median number of years of working experience was 6(range 1 to 20). 95% obtained education level of high school or above. There was a significant improvement in the feeding knowledge from pre-test score of 7 to post-test score of 9(out of 10). It was demonstrated that the knowledge score was superior in those with

working experiences less than 10 years compared with those worked for more than 10 years (8 vs 6 in pre-test; 10 vs 9 in post-test). The bedside assessment demonstrated that the overall compliance rate of the proper feeding techniques was 93%(range 81% to 100%). All participants reported that the program increased their confidence and was useful to their knowledge and skills. This promising result encouraged us to continue and expand our program to other specialties in which dysphagia is an important clinical problem. It also revealed that all HCAs regardless of their working years could benefit from this program