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Patient Care Assistant role enhancement: Improved oral nutritional supplement consumption on malnourished patients

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Introduction

Oral nutrition supplements (ONS) have been proven to improve nutrition status and functional outcomes in malnourished patients. However, studies pointed out that consumption rate on ONS was not ideal in hospital malnourished patients. A service evaluation of 41 randomly selected malnourished patients was carried out at North District Hospital (NDH) in June 2016. The evaluation result identified that only 62% of ONS prescribed by the dietitians were consumed by patients due to patient preference, patient nutrition knowledge deficit, and accessibility.

Objectives

To ensure patients are receiving optimal nutrition care during their hospital journey, Dietetics Department of North District Hospital implemented a quality improvement initiative on Patient Care Assistant (PCA) role enhancement to facilitate the ONS consumption rate on malnourished patients in July 2016.

Methodology

The Australian Council on Healthcare Standards suggested that hospital should enhance the role of healthcare assistant in facilitating nutrition care. In addition, the stepped-care model in Hospital Authority Clinical Psychology service suggested that PCA with enhanced role and competency have improved the service throughput by taking up the low-intensity tasks from the Clinical Psychologists. The aim of this initiative was to improve the nutrition intake in malnourished patients, measured by ONS consumption rate, against the baseline. To enhance the staff competency for the new role, the Dietetics Department provided relative training to strengthen the skills and knowledge of the PCA, and the following measures were then introduced to achieve the objective:

PCA enhanced roles:

1. Ensure ONS can be delivered to the malnourished patients.
2. Remind, encourage, and assist patients in taking the ONS.
3. Alert dietitian to review for any ONS non-compliance.

Result

The aim of this initiative was to improve nutrition intake, measured by ONS consumption rate, in malnourished patients against the baseline data. A PAC with the enhanced role was introduced to facilitate the ONS consumption in malnourished patients. A review was carried out in November 2016 to evaluate the effectiveness of the PCA role enhancement measures on ONS consumption rate. Forty randomly selected malnourished patient's ONS consumption records were compared to the baseline using Chi-square test. The ONS consumption rate improved significantly from 62% to 95% with a p value < 0.01. This review suggested that role enhancement initiative in Patient Care Assistant significantly improved the oral nutrition supplement consumption rate in malnourished patients. Further study should look at the effects of the PCA with the enhanced role on other the quality outcomes such as the length of stay and patient nutritional status.