Implementation of a Volunteer-Based Hospital Program for Older Adults
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Background

• A multi-faceted, volunteer-led, hospital-based program\(^1\) has been shown to:
  • Reduce the incidence of delirium
  • Decrease hospital length of stay
  • Reduce hospital costs.
• Implementation of such a program requires upfront investment.
• A smaller, volunteer-based visitation program for older adults may provide support for the allocation of more hospital resources in delirium prevention and establishment of a formal Hospital Elder Life Program\(^1\) in this institution.
• This research aims to investigate:
  • If the implementation of a visitation program is feasible at this hospital
  • Volunteer experience with the program.

Methods

• Pilot program on inpatient hospital medical-surgical units in a large, urban academic medical center
• Volunteers were recruited and trained to complete structured activities based on the Hospital Elder Life Program\(^1\).
• Patients were referred to volunteers by unit nurses.
• Volunteers completed questionnaires about their visit with each patient.
• Pilot period from 11/14/2017 to 3/30/2018
• Data from the questionnaires over the pilot period were compiled.

  • Quantitative measures:
    • Time spent with the patient
    • Type of activity done with the patient
  • Qualitative measure:
    • Feedback from volunteers for each visit

Results

• 42 volunteers were trained over 6 sessions.
• 236 patient visits were conducted during the pilot period.
• Each volunteer saw 2.5 patients on average during a 3 hour volunteer shift.
• 73% of visits were shorter than 30 minutes.
• Approximately 86% of patients were seen only once.
• Approximately 10% of patients declined a visit with volunteers.
• Orientation and conversation-based activities were the most common interventions done with patients.
• Comments from volunteers included concerns about individual patients’ well-being, concerns, and interests.

Conclusion

• There was robust interest in the volunteer training program among the hospital volunteer staff.
• Nearly all patients in the study were seen only once.
• The majority of visits were also shorter than 30 minutes.
• Further research is needed to determine the program’s impact on delirium rates.
• Volunteer training will be focused at directing volunteers to maintain continuity with patients and engage them more fully during the visit.
• This research provides evidence that it is feasible to implement a volunteer-based visitation program at our hospital.
• Feedback regarding the program from volunteers is largely positive and shows concern for patients.

Reference