

The Role of Education and Innovative Communication Tools in Improving Non-Verbal Communication

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Problem: There is much literature to support the need, desire, and impact that nurses have on a patient's ability to effectively communicate. Ineffective non verbal communication leads to unmet needs and frustration for both patient and nurse. However, little has been done to educate the nurses to improve the effectiveness of their communication techniques with intubated patients.

Evidence: Surveys to assess the nurse's perceptions about communicating with non-verbal mechanically ventilated patients were completed by 97% of the STICU nurses (n=63). 82% reported receiving no formal training, and 60.3% reported learning by watching others. Only 52.5% reported satisfaction with their ability to communicate, while perceiving patient satisfaction of 31.2%.

Strategy: Acute care communication algorithm was developed and implemented. Nursing staff were offered the opportunity to attend a 1 ½ hour communication course. The communication program was on exhibit in the public hallway demonstrating innovative communication tools.

Practice Change: Practice change began with staff attending the communication class. The communication algorithm was integrated into practice to standardize approaches selected to facilitate communication with non-verbal patients. New tools were made available on nursing unit. Staff and family members readily sought out communication tools.

Evaluation: Patients were interviewed post extubation utilizing a 21 question survey. Nurses completed a 7 question survey and course evaluation.

Results: 100% of the 36 nurses that attended the communication training stated the course met their learning needs. 66.6% of the patients reported utilizing a new communication device and 70% of patients reported being able to communicate their needs.

Recommendations: Formal training for nurses and standardized approach for selecting appropriate communication methods is vital to improving communication with non-verbal patients. Various communication tools need to be readily available to meet changing needs of the ICU patient. Post extubation patient interviews provide a mechanism for evaluating effectiveness of a unit's communication program and provide ongoing insight that can be incorporated into staff education.

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