

37.

Do you have key words for communication with family members?

Question

Some of our patient care managers suggest that our scores are not improving because we are not communicating with our patients' family members. How do we convince our staff that communicating with families is just as important as communicating to patients?

Answer

Communication with family members is vital. In fact, one CEO I know shares a story with new employees during orientation about his own experience as an outpatient for surgery. He says that while his personal interactions with staff were under 30 minutes (he checked in, was prepped for surgery, and had a few interactions with the recovery nurse after waking), his wife was with him for 16 hours interacting with staff the entire time. In this way, he connects the dots for staff that the hospital's customer is more than just the patient. It is the family as well.

Families may impact patient perception of care by up to 50 percent. In the case of most pediatric patients, surveys are completed by their parents. Many children of geriatric patients complete the surveys for their parents.

For inpatient care, at the time of admission, ask the patient about communication and how he or she wants the family involved. It is particularly important that the patient identifies the key contact person to receive information.

A key family member will communicate with the rest of the family, saving staff time. When rounding, have nurse leaders say to the patient, “We want to make sure your family feels it is getting good communication during your stay here. If they have any questions, here is what they can do.” At the time of discharge—particularly if family members are involved, as they often are—say, “We want to make sure that you, the family, are kept informed. Are there any questions I can answer?”

In summary: 1. Clear expectations, 2. Key words, 3. Closure upon discharge.