

Implementation of an Inpatient to Outpatient Communication Pathway to Improve Outcomes in High-Risk Oncology Patients.

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Published In/Presented At

Procaccino, K., Gilboy, J., Brennan, J., Levine, E., Stone, A., & Wittman, A. (2022). *Implementation of an inpatient to outpatient communication pathway to improve outcomes in high-risk oncology patients*. Poster presented at Lehigh Valley Health Network, Allentown, PA.

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Opportunity

Sodexo oncology dietitians at Lehigh Valley Health Network identified that hospitalized oncology inpatients may fall out of nutrition care after discharge and may not be referred to Sodexo outpatient oncology nutrition in a timely manner, or at all.

Methods

The oncology nutrition service team built an inpatient to outpatient clinical pathway enabling cross referral of oncology patients who were either malnourished or high risk nutrition patients with an outcome database to track results. The inclusion criteria for this project includes inpatients with esophagectomy, gastrectomy, Whipple, or head and neck surgery. Outpatient oncology dietitians upon receipt of the inpatient referral order call patients within 7 days of their inpatient discharge. They review the inpatient care plan, necessary intervention therapy adjustment, confirm the outpatient in-person visit, and coordinate ongoing outpatient nutrition care as indicated.

Strategy

Strategies for successful implementation include the inpatient dietitian orders an outpatient oncology RD consult, outpatient oncology RD then sets up a timely phone/telehealth visit and regular follow up visits at 1, 3 and 6 months with completion of a patient outcome tracker to capture measurable results.

Real Impact

Measurable results for this pathway to date include a 45% reduction in time from the inpatient to outpatient encounter for malnourished patients from our inclusion group. An additional 25% reduction in 45-day readmission rates with a 65% reduction in nutritional diagnosis readmit reason, all these results attributed to the improved nutrition therapy case management provision by implementation of the oncology nutrition clinical pathway.

Next Steps

Future opportunities includes adding consistent hand grip strength measurement between inpatient and outpatient encounters to provide a more objective measurement over time, as well as expanding communication of the pathway beyond just the oncology inpatient unit.

Clinical Pathway

