Code Purple: Keeping our Memory Impaired Patients Safe

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CODE PURPLE: An audio code designation alerting the organization to an elopement of a patient with a history of dementia.

BACKGROUND/EVIDENCE
• Three out of five persons with dementia will wander (Neubauer, et al., 2018).
• Strategies to improve care and safeguard patients with dementia include:
  • Screening for dementia
  • Assessing competency and capacity for decision making
  • Identifying and communicating with surrogate decision makers
  • Standardizing communication of patient’s diagnosis with all staff (Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority, 2016)
• Our academic 1,200 bed Magnet® facility had no standardized communication plan or formal response processes in place to address the risk of geriatric elopement.
• The design of Code Purple was triggered by evidence in the literature and facility addressing the risk of elopement in patients with dementia.

GOAL
• Design a plan to prevent elopement incidents in patients with a history of cognitive impairment.

METHODS/INTERVENTIONS
INITIATED JANUARY, 2016:
FORMED AN INTRAPROFESSIONAL TEAM
• Led by Network Security
  • Included:
    • Nursing
    • Risk Management
    • Department of Geriatrics
    • Network Safety

IDENTIFIED THE PATIENT RISK FOR ELOPEMENT
• Based on provider documentation – one or more of the following:
  • Cognitive impairment
  • Alzheimer’s
  • Dementia
• Previous elopements
• Memory impairment

• Attached a purple circle label on the patient’s wrist band to alert hospital personnel
• Created and initiated use of a Code Purple Elopement Checklist (included the patient’s photo)

DEFINED RESPONSIBILITIES
• Emergency Dispatcher (Security staff member)
• Nursing
• Emergency Communication Center

OUTCOMES
• There were 4 documented successful Code Purple events within the network.
• All Code Purple events within the network resulted in a timely location of the patient without injury indicating the effectiveness of the Code Purple Protocol.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS
• Elopement of patients with impaired memory cognition is a serious and potentially dangerous situation.
• Awareness of these consequences and a proactive response plan is critical for the safety of this population.

REFERENCES


Neubauer, Noelannah et al. What do we do about strategies to manage dementia-related wandering: A scoping review. Published by Elsevier Inc. on behalf of the Alzheimer’s Association, vol.10, 2018, pp.615-628.doi.org/10.1016/j.dadm.2018.08.001