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Sepsis: A Rapid Killer and Global Health Crisis

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Blood stream infections (BSIs) and sepsis contribute to 8 million annual deaths globally, with approximately 1.5 million Americans affected annually (CDC, 2017). The costs associated with this health crisis are astronomical. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) identifies sepsis as the most expensive condition treated in United States (U.S.) hospitals, exceeding \$20 billion in 2011 with projected annual increases of 11.9% (World Sepsis Day, n.d.). There remains a concerning number of medical professionals, patients, and community members that are unable to recognize basic signs and symptoms, and demonstrate knowledge regarding when to seek medical attention for this life threatening, yet potentially preventable condition. The purpose of this presentation is to describe the innovative way an outpatient dialysis unit addressed this global health problem using education, assessment and nurse empowerment to improve performance and reduce the BSI rate in the outpatient dialysis patient population.

Methodology: Addressing the Problem

Pre-education was administered as the formative assessment and post-education as a summative assessment. Education was provided to targeted groups such as staff, patients and support person(s). Tools and resources were used from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Sepsis Alliance. Transparency of department specific data and outcomes regarding BSIs were provided during education sessions. An outpatient dialysis sepsis assessment tool was created as a variant from other evidence-based sepsis assessment screens in order to best fit the outpatient dialysis patient population. Direct care nurses worked in collaboration with the program director and nephrologists in designing the tool and its design inherently empowers nurses to take assertive action if signs and symptoms present.

Results: Nephrology Nurse Value

As a result, the nephrology nurse remains in a pivotal position to enhance collaboration among providers in the healthcare continuum, and they have been instrumental in promoting patient-centered goals. They intimately know their patients and support person(s) and have had the opportunity to direct care consistent with patient wishes. A reduction in BSIs has been realized, demonstrating patient safety can be a direct result of empowering nephrology nurses through education and more thorough nursing assessments.

Conclusion

Sepsis is a pervasive, global health crisis that is potentially preventable and treatable if identified early with rapid treatment initiation. Innovative assessments, coupled with delivering education for targeted audiences may make a major impact in reducing incidents and saving lives both locally and globally.

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