Implementation of an Electronic Palliative Care Screening Tool

Amy Cutman, BSN, RN Manager of Care Coordination
Margaret Kreher, MD Palliative Medicine Program
Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center
500 University Drive Hershey, PA 17033-0850

Margaret Kreher, MD Palliative Medicine Program
Elaine Davis, BSN, RN Care Coordinator
Cheri West, MS, RN Clinical Performance Improvement Specialist

Introduction
Palliative care adds expertise in symptom management, care planning, establishing treatment goals, and provides emotional support to patients and their families. However, identifying patients who are appropriate for this additional layer of care is often difficult. At the Penn State Hershey Medical Center, an Electronic Palliative Care Screening Tool was implemented to identify patients who are appropriate for palliative care consultation in the adult medical population.

Objectives:
1. Outline the process used to implement an electronic palliative care screening tool for case managers.
2. Illustrate how an electronic screening tool can assist case managers in identifying patients who are appropriate for palliative care referrals.
3. Describe the impact of an electronic screening tool on patient and family satisfaction.
4. Demonstrate the impact that an electronic screening tool can have in early identification of palliative care needs and transition to acute inpatient hospice.

Description of Tool
The Palliative Care Screening Tool is objective and consensus based on recommendations by the Center to Advance Palliative Care (CAPC). It is utilized on admission to assess patients according to their primary diagnosis, co-morbidities, functional status, and need for symptom management. Patients meeting the scoring guidelines are referred for palliative care early in their hospital stay. For patients who have a terminal illness and are appropriate for hospice, the palliative care consultant can facilitate transition to that level of care when the patient desires. Inpatient hospice can then provide additional emotional support and symptom management.

Discussion
Figure 1 reflects a 35% increase in Palliative Care consults in the initial pilot in the Medicine and Pulmonary patient populations. We maintained an average of 80 consults per month from April 2011 through December 2011. During that time frame education was provided to Care Coordinators to facilitate accurate identification of patients appropriate for palliative care versus hospice.

Next steps:
Evaluate effectiveness of process changes on palliative care services and earlier consults. In addition, transitioning patients appropriately to acute inpatient hospice, in combination with other hospital initiatives, has lowered our mortality rate by 11.5% and the mortality O/E ratio by 33%.

Conclusions
Implementation of the Electronic Palliative Care Screening Tool has resulted in an increased number of patients benefiting from palliative care services and earlier consults. In addition, transitioning patients appropriately to acute inpatient hospice, in combination with other hospital initiatives, has lowered our mortality rate by 11.5% and the mortality O/E ratio by 33%.

References
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