
ABSTRACT TITLE: Sound the Alarm! Standardizing the Use of Alarms to Decrease Falls

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PURPOSE: The purpose of this quality improvement project was to decrease the adult inpatient harmful fall rate from 0.71 (August, 2021 rate) to 0.50, the common national benchmark. The team also aimed to decrease the amount of falls in which there was an alarm activation opportunity.

RELEVANCE/SIGNIFICANCE: The adult inpatient harmful fall rate (HFR) increased from Fiscal Year (FY) '19 to FY '21 and was not consistently superior to the national benchmark. Organizational data demonstrated missed opportunities to utilize alarms in 38% of total falls. Falls have a significant impact including: increased length of stay for patients, increased costs, decreased quality of life for patients, short-term and long-term harm to patients, and psychological stress and physical harm to staff.

METHODS: An interdisciplinary team utilized Lean methodology and High Reliability Organization principles to develop housewide Standard Work that provided guidance on appropriate alarm interventions. The guidance allowed for nurse autonomy and facilitated an individualized approach to alarm usage. Leaders provided 1:1 staff education to ensure understanding. As a form of daily management, leaders performed safety checks to verify appropriate alarm activation.

RESULTS: The HFR decreased from 0.60 in FY '21 to 0.41 in FY '22. This was the first observed decline since FY '19. The total fall rate decreased from 2.03 in FY '21 to 1.92 in FY '22. Falls that occurred in which there was an alarm activation opportunity decreased from 38% at baseline (July, 2021-October, 2021) to 25% after the standards were implemented. Compliance with the new alarm activation standards improved from 75% at baseline to 87% by the end of April, 2022.

CONCLUSION: Implementation of alarm activation standards can decrease the incidence of harmful and total falls. Daily management is crucial for success and sustainability of standards including in-time staff follow-up to ensure patient safety and staff understanding.