

AHRQ Releases New Guide to Help Hospitals Engage Patients and Families in Their Health Care

Published: 7/10/2013 3 PM

ROCKVILLE, Md. -- A new resource available online today from HHS' Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) gives hospitals four evidence-based strategies to engage patients and families in their care. The field-tested strategies outlined in AHRQ's new Guide to Patient and Family Engagement in Hospital Safety and Quality can help hospitals make care better and safer by bridging the communication gaps among patients and families and their health care providers.

"Many of the errors we see in health care stem from communication problems," said AHRQ Director Carolyn M. Clancy, M.D. "That's why we developed this resource, to give hospitals practical, evidence-based information to improve communication on the front lines of health care – and ultimately keep patients safer."

The guide provides four evidence-based strategies that hospitals can use to implement patient- and family-centered care practices. Each strategy includes educational tools and resources for patients and families, training materials for health care professionals and real-world examples that show how strategies are being implemented in hospital settings. The strategies describe how patients and families, working with hospital staff, can:

- Be advisors. How hospitals can recruit and train patients and family members to serve as advisors and train clinicians and hospital staff to work effectively with them.

- Promote better communication at the bedside to improve quality. How patients and families can interact with the health care team, understand the different roles that team members play and see the importance of being partners with clinicians.

- Participate in bedside shift reports. Teaching patients and families what a bedside shift report is, how they can contribute to it and how nurses can support those contributions.

- Prepare to leave the hospital. Different approaches clinicians can use to plan and keep track of the tasks that need to be done before a patient is discharged from the hospital.

- Research to develop the guide found that communication gaps between patients and caregivers can occur when hospitals do not address the issues that patients think are most important. Another factor is that few tools are available to give health providers insights into patients' needs and concerns. As a result, efforts by patients, families and health providers to communicate more effectively with each other can fall short of their goal.

"We know that patients and families are eager to play a role in making health care safer," said Jeff Brady, M.D., associate director of AHRQ's Center for Quality Improvement and Patient Safety. "This guide fills an important—and largely unmet—need and gives hospitals concrete ways to put this shared interest into action." For a video clip of Dr. Brady discussing the new guide, please visit:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INzhyhY3e5E&feature=youtu.be&noredirect=1>.

Strategies outlined in the guide were tested and evaluated at Advocate Trinity Hospital, a 200-bed hospital serving a predominantly low-income community in Chicago; Anne Arundel Medical Center, a 324-bed hospital with a mix of suburban and rural patients in Annapolis, Md.; and Patewood Memorial Hospital, a 76-bed hospital serving a rural population in Greenville, S.C. Patient satisfaction scores based on the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems improved at all three hospitals and hospital staff reported improved time management and more positive views of patient- and family-centered care.

AHRQ will work with the HHS Partnership for Patients, which has made focusing on patient and family engagement a priority for its 26 hospital engagement networks and other stakeholders to share the guide with hospitals across the country.