



Student Walkers: Improving Care of the Elderly One Step at a Time

Joan Brower, BSN, RN, CGN Ashly Gartenberg ,BSN, RN, CMSRN Michele Power BSN, RN

Marybeth O'Malley MSN, RN, CGN and Sarah Kagan PhD, RN, FAAN

Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia PA



Identification of Needs

- Our advanced medical unit (Founders 12), in a large urban academic medical center, serves primarily older adults with multiple chronic conditions who are often functionally compromised
- Our falls rate is consistently higher than national and institutional benchmarks
- Frequent ambulation is known to be effective in reducing falls and preventing functional decline
- Our unit environment is not very conducive to patients ambulating unassisted
- We identified that enhancing our ability to mobilize patients might positively influence their functional status as well as their overall hospital experience

Literature Review

Literature points to mobilization and functional exercise as interventions that improve physical function and outcomes. However, some literature outlines that it is challenging for nurses to adequately mobilize patients in the acute care setting.

-Competing priorities and varying levels of knowledge and motivation, mobilization of patients is frequently neglected (Timmerman, 2007)

-Viewing mobility as a core component of nursing care will empower nurses to initiate this activity (Timmerman, 2007)

-Mobility benefits the patient population through:

- Decreasing length of stay
- Decrease skin breakdown and muscle wasting
- Decrease potential for falls
- Decrease complications (VTE, PE)
- Decrease mortality (Tracy, 2004)

Timmerman, R. (2007). A Mobility Protocol for Critically Ill Adults. *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing*, 26(5), 175-179.

Tracy, M. (2004). Mobility Protocol Nursing Standard of Care. *Critical Care Nurse*, 24(4), 88-90.

Goals and Measurement

- Our goal was to test the feasibility of a Student Walker Program
- Undergraduate nursing students from our local nursing school were trained to mobilize patients

Feasibility measures:

- Could we sustain nursing students' interest in the Student Walker Program?
- Could we manage staffing and accountability of students within our nursing workflow?
- Would patients willingly take part in the Student Walker Program?
- Would the student-patient socialization naturally evolve, lending to potential extended benefits of the Student Walker Program?

Satisfaction measures:

- Student walkers administered a 3 question survey to patients immediately after walking to gauge satisfaction with the experience
- Students were queried regarding their level of satisfaction with the experience



Implementation and Components

- The concept of utilizing students as specific walkers for patients was created by clinical nurses in February 2011
- Clinical nurses developed program related materials, educational information for the students and promotional information
- This idea was presented to nursing administration who approved and budgeted for these positions
- Nursing recruitment screened the applicants and presented eligible candidates to the unit based nursing leadership
- After an interview process four student were hires into these paid positions and oriented to their role.
- A representative from nursing education developed a curriculum with the assistance of the clinical nurse specialist to target specific areas of engaging activity for the elderly
- A NICHE toolkit was created to assist the student walkers in engaging the elderly beyond walking
- The toolkit included games such as checkers, cards, Yahtzee, Uno and dominos

Patients are invited to participate in the program if they:

- Are older than 65 years of age
- Have an increased risk for falls as measured by the Morse Falls Scale
- Require mobilization assistance
- Experience altered elimination patterns
- Demonstrate nutritional deficiencies
- Exhibit alterations in their mental/cognitive status
- Display actual or potential alterations in skin integrity
- Could benefit from additional companionship and interactions

Evaluation

- On average, student walkers visited 6 patients daily
- Students ambulated patients and conversed with each patient for approximately 20-30 minutes
- Our unit staff was able to easily facilitate scheduling of student walkers
- Students were accountable and maintained interest in the program
- In addition to walking, students also engaged patients in activities including checkers, cards, coloring and conversation
- Students reported that the experience was rewarding and increased their comfort level in working directly with patients

•Direct quotes from patients:

- “Lifted my spirits up”
- “Helped my self esteem”
- “The walk and conversation was wonderfully encouraging”
- “Very helpful and cheerful”
- “Good workout”
- “The care was proper and professional”



Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Student walkers collaborated with the following disciplines to deliver individualized and supportive care to our patient population

- Clinical Nurses
- Physicians
- Physical therapists
- Certified Nursing Assistants
- Transportation technicians
- Clinical Nurse Specialist

Dissemination and Promotion

The role of the Student Walkers was presented to staff in multiple arenas:

- Educational sessions
- Unit Council monthly meetings
- Staff monthly meetings
- Unit Based Clinical Leadership weekly meetings
- Medical Nursing leadership weekly meetings
- Nursing Grand Rounds
- The University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing
- The Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania website listing employment opportunities

Conclusions and Future Directions

- This project demonstrated that it is feasible to engage nursing students in walking frail older adults
- The Implementation of Student Walkers had a positive effect on those who participated
- Future directions include: (a)Expanding the Student Walker Program to other units, and (b) Measuring the impact of the program on falls rates, functional status changes, social engagement, and pressure ulcer rates

The authors of this project would like to thank Sarah Kagan PhD, RN, FAAN for her expertise in the geriatric population.