



Managing Complex Behavioral Health Patients on Medical-Surgical Units
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Summary: Up to 60% of hospital inpatients have dual medical and active psychiatric diagnoses. The goals of the complex behavioral health patients (CBHP) program are to standardize the management of CBHP, reduce the number of assaults against healthcare providers, decrease the number of behavior response team activations, decrease constant observation utilization, and improve staff perception of safety in the workplace. Focus areas of the program are CBHP identification, patient management, environmental assessment, constant observation, documentation, education, and suicide prevention. To aid the healthcare team in safely managing CBHP, the patient safety assistant (PSA) role trains unlicensed assistive personnel with advanced skills in verbal de-escalation techniques. Outcome measures include huddle impact, assault data, and effects of behavioral response team activations. Staff assaults and behavioral response team activations have decreased. Next steps include Crisis Prevention Institute non-violent crisis intervention training for medical-surgical units with high behavioral response team utilization and annual competencies for the PSA role.

Nursing Implications:

- Redirect unacceptable behavior and offer options so the patient does not feel a loss of control.
- Implement a standardized process for an environment risk assessment to help identify and remove safety risks.
- Utilize a standardized handoff report tool to improve staff communication of patient behaviors.
- Be proactive and consistent in setting boundaries for the safety of patient and staff.
- Use structure and routine to encourage patient cooperation and prevent outbursts.

Key Takeaways:

- Interprofessional huddles are imperative in developing a plan to keep complex behavioral health patients safe.
- Unlicensed assistive personnel can help nurses keep complex behavioral health patients safe.
- The Columbia Suicide Severity Risk Scale helps to identify appropriate patient interventions based on level of risk.
- Caring for patients with complex behavioral health needs provides opportunities to develop creative individualized plans of care.

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