

Research Explained

Designing a Process for Cardiology Patient Transfers: A Quality Improvement, Descriptive Study on Interprovider Communication and Resident Education. John T. Kulesa, MD*; Sheri L. Balsara, MD; Emanuel T. Ghebremariam, MPH; Jessica Colyer, MD.

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*This Research Explained was prepared by
Jessica Colyer, (author), Lawrence Greiten (clinician),
Joshua Egan (parent)*

About this Study

Why is this study important?

- When patients move from the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit (CICU) to the acute care cardiology unit (ACCU), transfer of care should be seamless and complete so that the accepting team has the information needed to safely transition and progress the patient's care. With this transfer of care, the main care team changes from a more advanced trained fellow to a more junior resident. Given the difference in training levels of these providers, there may be gaps related to plans of care and shared understanding of complex cardiopulmonary (heart/lung) structure and function. This study aimed to improve communication during the hand off process, while decreasing these potential knowledge gaps between providers around this at risk patient population.

How was this study performed?

- A questionnaire was given to the ACCU residents to better understand what they believed were challenges related to patient transfers from the CICU.
- From these responses, the authors developed a check list, started care team huddles, and educated the care teams about process improvements.
 - Any additional concerns identified in the questionnaire were addressed during the care team education.
- After this process, the residents were surveyed again to evaluate how the protocol had improved patient transfer.

What were the results of the research?

- Through these interventions, the residents felt better prepared to accept and provide care of patients who transferred from the CICU to the ACCU.
- Direct (face to face) transition from CICU provider (fellow) to acute care provider (resident) increased throughout the study.

What are the limitations of this study?

- Small sample size.
- Limited time of follow up (4 months).

- More data is needed to deeply evaluate the potential effect of patient specific outcomes including length of stay and/or delays in transfer, as well as the experiences of patients and family members related to care team readiness for transfer of care.

What is the impact of this study?

- Transitions in intensity of care can be a vulnerable time for these complex patients because of poor communication and/or variable level of expertise. The authors showed that creating a protocol that streamlined these processes and improved communication has the potential to improve patient care by ensuring a smooth transition between care teams while developing provider skill.