

REVEALING HIDDEN ASPIRATIONS IN THE ICU

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Purpose and PICO Question

The purpose of this project was to increase objective swallowing assessments used to identify ICU patients at risk for aspiration. The best practice swallowing evaluation is a bedside procedure called Fiber optic Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing (FEES). In an adult hospital ICU, will providing staff education on the FEES protocol result in more swallow referrals?

Background and Evidence Review

Due to the medical fragility of patients in the ICU, accurate identification of those at risk for prandial aspiration due to dysphagia is necessary to prevent pulmonary complications. Patients are under-referred for bedside swallow evaluations (by SLP and OT). Studies estimate silent aspiration in patients with dysphagia is between 28-49%. 82% of aspiration incidents in tracheotomy patients are silent. FEES is an objective measure of swallow function that may be used at bedside and identifies aspiration.

Methods

After contacting similar CA hospitals with training programs, a program was established using the best practice FEES assessment. Training for therapists to administer the new protocol was initiated. Staff nurses, who are first line screeners, were educated about needs for the protocol and how to initiate referrals.

Results

7 SLPs were trained in FEES and 40 ICU nurses were educated in swallow evaluation referrals and benefits of FEES. Nurses' knowledge scores increased regarding referral criteria and evaluation components. After two weeks, there was an increase in referrals from 1-3/day to 2-4/day. Clinicians expressed excitement at the patient benefits the FEES program will offer.

Conclusion

The SHC FEES program was initiated and early outcomes are favorable. ICU nurses report a better understanding of patient benefits over usual care and referrals have increased.

Selected References

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Key words: evidence-based practice, silent aspiration, dysphagia, clinical bedside swallow evaluation, videofluoroscopy, fiberoptic endoscopic evaluation of swallowing, acute care