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Improving Nursing Documentation In Acute Psychiatry.

Objectives: To determine if a brief, informal discussion with individual staff nurses in acute psychiatry will improve documentation of patient care and acuities.

Background: Nursing documentation in psychiatry is notoriously lacking in quality. EBP studies show that it is difficult to improve nurses' documentation. One study showed an improvement in documentation quality with a formal, grand operation. However, it also found that when the nurses were engaged in the project, they responded well to feedback when humor was involved. This suggests that informal communication may be just as effective for change as formal in-services.

Methods: An audit of 50 nursing notes (each including day, evening and night shifts) was completed on two acute psychiatric units at SFGH. Staff nurses were individually selected, talked with, and given a checklist of five elements that should be included in their notes. These discussions were a few minutes long and took place on the units during "down times." Afterwards, a second audit was conducted of an additional 50 notes.

Results: A 21% increase was calculated as a total average increase in the inclusion of the five elements. Problem identification increased by 12%. Quotes increased by 17%. The documentation of the frequency of intervention attempts increased by 2%. Descriptions of behavior increased by 32%. The largest increase, at 42%, was seen in the documentation of nurse-patient interaction.

Implications/Conclusions: Improvement in psychiatric nursing documentation is possible without formal in-services. However, due to researcher bias and no inter-rater reliability, it is supposed that additional staff interaction and interventions are needed for a larger and more conclusive improvement in documentation. Policy revision is suggested. A measure of improvements in reimbursement may be justified. *A key finding includes the importance of interaction; Nurse-patient interaction, as well as staff communication, improves documentation.* Additional research may focus on the benefits of electronic documentation.