



UNDERSTANDING AND CORRECTING PATIENT FALL ISSUES AT NEW FACILITY

**Nephrology Associates of Central Maine
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Contact Information

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Category:	Patient Falls
Type of Facility:	Fresenius Medical Care, Androscoggin Kidney Center
Number of Patients:	70
Number of Physicians:	4
Number of Nurse Practitioners:	
Number of Physician Assistants:	

Background

In the mid-1990s, Fresenius Medical Care and Nephrology Associates of Central Maine opened a new dialysis unit in Auburn, Maine and closed its existing facility in Lewiston, Maine temporarily while the original unit was renovated. All 70 patients were moved to the new unit. The new facility was a previous Home Health Agency building, which had been completely rebuilt into a dialysis unit. The parking lot was new, as was a covered entrance.

Contrary to the practice's experience at its original facility, just as soon as patients were transferred to the new facility, a series of patient falls began to occur. In addition to patient falls within the unit and at its entrance and exit, the staff identified several near-accidents among patients being transported in and out of the facility by ambulances. These included patients in wheelchairs and on stretchers, which teetered as they bumped curbs near the entrance/exit.

While staff identified some obvious causes of falls and near-misses, the dialysis unit administrator and the nephrologists took a strategic approach to the problem, creating a task force on falls. The group included emergency medical technicians from the community, housekeeping staff, nurses, social workers, and the practice administrator. After conducting a root cause analysis, the task force identified four issues to be addressed:

1. irregular curb contours at the ambulance entrance
2. difficult-to-see curb
3. patients' orthostatic dizziness
4. floor care within the unit

Policies Implemented

As a result of the root cause analysis, Nephrology Associates of Central Maine instituted the following changes:

1. Changed the configuration of the curb where ambulances load and unload to ensure that it had a gradual incline.
2. Painted the curb iridescent so that it would be easily visible even on snowy or rainy nights.
3. Changed floor waxing to be consistent with that used in the original facility.
4. Created a wheelchair parking area, separate from patient areas, to minimize the chance of anyone tripping on them.
5. Renewed staff's focus on asking each patient about dizziness during and after each treatment. While this is accepted practice today, it was not necessarily part of patient screening 10 years ago. Staff focused asking each patient about any spells of orthostatic dizziness and addressed the cause of each patient's dizziness. Any patients with any difficulties with dizziness sit closest to nursing stations and would be assisted as they left the building. Any patient experiencing dizziness after treatment is told to sit and is not released until they meet specific criteria.
6. Dedicated one ambulance-only entrance, which controlled traffic and eliminated this potential source of falls as patients walk into or exit the facility. A doorbell was installed so that emergency medical technicians could alert staff as ambulances arrived.

Implementation of these changes completely eliminated falls in the new facility. When the original facility was reopened following renovations, staff began inquiring patients about dizziness. All other physical issues were not relevant to the original facility.

Recommendations

The root cause analysis uncovered very specific areas for correction and improvement, both clinical issues and those relevant to the interior and exterior physical structure and traffic flow. Candace Walworth, M.D. recommends that dialysis staff consider the interaction among wheelchair and ambulatory traffic, to eliminate any potential sources of falls. Also, be specific about housekeeping specifications. In this case, the housekeeping at each facility was conducted by different services under separate contracts. The difference in floor care had contributed to falls in the new facility.