

Project Team

Roudebush VAMC, HSRD, Center of Excellence

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The Need

A recent report by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) evaluated the management of patients with feeding and swallowing problems, or dysphagia, in VHA medical facilities. Significant variations in care and opportunities for improvement in dysphagia evaluation and management exist. This directive instructed all VA medical centers to screen all hospitalized veterans for dysphagia.

The Research Aims

The objective of this study is to evaluate and improve the implementation of a nursing dysphagia screening process using a healthcare system redesign strategy.

Systems-Research Tools

The evaluation involves a mixed method approach including: semi-structured interviews; human factors analyses; and a retrospective medical record review. The intervention involved a 100-day system redesign approach using Lean Six Sigma Systems methods with front-line health care providers.

Project Overview

In the first three months after implementation of the dysphagia screening tool, a total of 2030/2071 (98.0%) of all veterans admitted to the facility received screening and 166/2030 (8.2%) had a positive screen. The overall nursing compliance rate for mandated dysphagia education was 564/923 (61.1%). The system redesign methodology is in progress but has already identified several problems with the dysphagia screening tool including: the length and content of the tool; delays in patient receiving oral medications; confusion regarding diet status; confusion regarding diet taxonomy; access to speech-language pathology on nights/weekends; and inadequate communication of positive screening results among staff members. The process has revealed that the use of dysphagia diets have increased substantially and that general awareness about dysphagia has improved. *(continued)*

Project Overview

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In response to these preliminary findings we have: revised the nursing screening tool; performed usability testing on the modified screening tool; implemented the revised tool; and developed patient and provider education materials. Data regarding several outcomes is pending at this time (e.g., sensitivity and specificity of the tool; change in dysphagia screening rates; change in pneumonia rates; change in speech consultation rates; and change in length of stay).

The Impact on Veterans

The OIG has reported significant variation in screening veterans for dysphagia. If we find that process improvements can be made and sustained using a system redesign approach, then our results may be useful across the spectrum of VA facilities seeking to improve dysphagia screening.

Department of Veterans Affairs

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Center for Health Services & Outcomes Research
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National Stroke QuERI Coordinating Center
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