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Supporting the Patient Transfer Process - Is there a Minimum Standard?

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ABSTRACT

The standardization of the information sharing component of the patient transfer process has long been recognized as a necessary intervention in health care. Both clinicians and patients have described the transfer process as one in which there is a great deal of variance in both the amount and quality of information transferred to the receiving facility. By streamlining this process, we have the opportunity to transform care delivery, into a more efficient and accurate system, reducing the risk of human error. For nurses, a chief aspect of this transformation involves refocusing their work away from being a channel of information and communication among health care providers, back to direct patient care.

A study was conducted among health care providers representing various health care sectors. The purpose was to determine what data elements are required as a minimum for all patient transfers, regardless of the transferring or receiving health care sector. Representatives from several sectors of health care in a large Canadian city were interviewed using a standard questionnaire. The results showed a consistent grouping of required patient information, despite the variation in health care sector. This study supports the development of a minimum data set that facilitates smooth patient transfers within and across care sectors, moving the data via an information portal. Future research to determine what the minimum data elements are in a larger sample size and effective technology to transfer the minimum data set is needed.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Julie is currently a Clinical Application Specialist in the Informatics Department at Mount Sinai Hospital. Julie joined the Smart Chart Project in July 2004, working as the lead on Clinical Documentation. Julie completed a Master in Nursing at the University of Toronto, and a Baccalaureate in Nursing Science at Ryerson University. Throughout her career Julie has also worked in clinical trials within the pharmaceutical industry, and as a cardiovascular and paediatric intensive care nurse at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto.

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Dr. Lynn Nagle recently established her own consulting practice under Nagle & Associates Inc. She is currently providing consulting on issues and initiatives related to nursing and health informatics. Her work as a clinician, educator, researcher and administrator has provided her with a broad-based perspective of healthcare delivery and information needs. In her current capacity, she is providing strategic, educational, and operational consulting for a variety of clients at a local, provincial and national level.