

Unsigned Notes in the Critical Care Units

The Problem

Failure to authenticate (sign) indicates that clinical documentation is incomplete. Complete documentation is necessary to: **1.** Support clinical decision making, **2.** Ensure compliance with BIDMC Medical Record policies, CMS requirements, and TJC standards, and **3.** Justify payment for services.

Goals

The goal of the project was to eliminate all unsigned notes in the MetaVision® (MV) record. This required establishing a process to identify and remediate unsigned notes prior to the locking of the electronic record (currently 96 hours post discharge from the ICU).

The Team

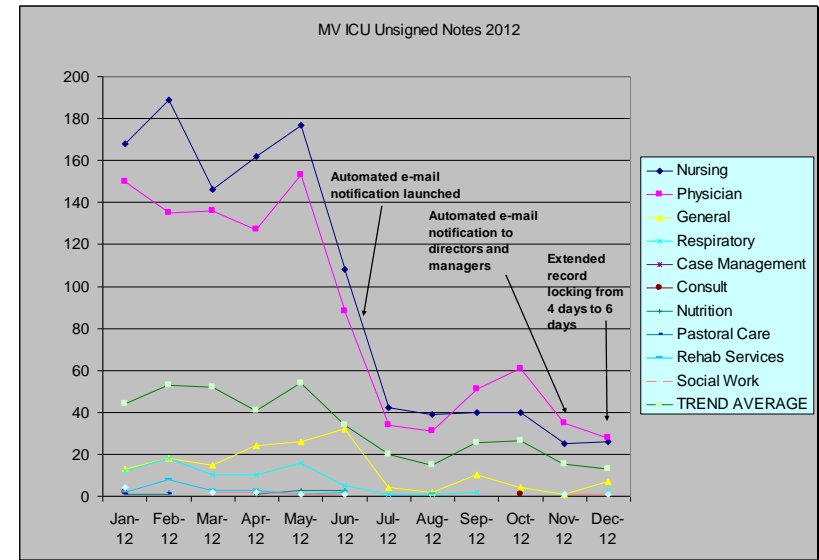
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The Interventions

- January, 2012; the issue of unsigned notes was brought to Critical Care Executive Committee for discussion.
- MV staff developed queries to accurately identify unsigned notes by user.
- MV staff worked with vendor and Database Administrators to create background query that would run every morning and automatically send email to users regarding the presence of an unsigned note.
- May, 2012; MV staff tested system with emails to designated personnel to ascertain query validity.
- June 12, 2012; initial emails started being sent to individual users when the presence of an unsigned note was determined.
- November, 2012; a nightly report of any unsigned notes on patients discharged from the ICUs started being sent to directors and managers for follow-up.

The Results/Progress to Date

Between 1/1/2012 -12/31/2012, there has been a continual and significant reduction in the number of unsigned notes for the critical care units since the initiation of the emails to users.



Lessons Learned

The automated notification process heightened awareness of the problem and resulted in significant changes in user workflow, with many incorporating a routine check for unsigned notes before ending their shift. User education remains an ongoing need; most MV support calls are related to assisting users in finding the unsigned note associated with the notification.

Next Steps

The Team plans to do the following:

- Extend the record open window beyond 96 hours while monitoring system performance.
- Continue monitoring the number of unsigned notes in the MV system.
- Evaluate educational opportunities to improve follow-through and appropriate system usage.

