

A Multidisciplinary Approach: Improving the Care of Patients with Spinal Cord Injury and their Families

The Problem

- Patients with spinal cord injury (SCI) make up only a very small percentage of the overall patient population, and as a result, maintaining an updated set of treatment guidelines for this unique patient population has been overlooked.
- A spinal cord injury is an unexpected, emotionally and physically traumatic, life altering occurrence. There is currently no prepared informational material in place at BIDMC to educate and support patients and their families in this challenging time.
- Ideally, patients with spinal cord injury are transferred to a rehabilitation facility after receiving acute management at BIDMC. As a result, the hospital only goes so far as to prepare patients for discharge to a rehab facility, where they will gradually prepare for their transition home. However, a number of patients with spinal cord injury are uninsured and consequently have no option other than to go directly home after their hospital stay. There is no standardized system in place at BIDMC to provide these particular patients with basic resources to assist them with this difficult transition from hospital to home.

Aim/Goal

- The goal of this project has been to create a functional, multidisciplinary SCI pathway that smoothly transitions the patient from trauma bay → ICU → floor → extended care/home. Due to the wide variation between individual cases, the team aimed to create a pathway that is standardized, while also allowing for the flexibility to be appropriately modified for each individual patient.
- The team also decided to design educational Spinal Cord Injury packets that will provide patients and their families with an overview of SCI. This packet will educate them about what to expect during their hospital stay and the physical and emotional aspects of their condition and recovery.
- The team aims to begin implementation of this project by the end of 2015.

The Team

Trauma Program Staff: Darlene Sweet, BSN, RN, Trauma Program Director; Melissa Voisine, BSN RN, Trauma Educator/Injury Prevention and Outreach Coordinator; Diana Johnson, Trauma Administrative Coordinator

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The Interventions

- Met bi-weekly for multidisciplinary discussion.
- Rewrote the clinical pathway by comparing past guidelines with current practices, sample pathways from outside organizations and personal experience.
- Created patient and family educational packets that provide resources that are valuable for patients with spinal cord injury who will be transferred to rehab as well as those who are discharged directly home.
- Distributed four copies of the Christopher and Dana Reeve's Foundation's Paralysis Resource Guide (two in English and two in Spanish) to the CC6 and TISCU patient care areas for patients and families to utilize during their stay.

The Results/Progress to Date

- An eight-day clinical pathway has been created and is currently awaiting final committee approval from BIDMC's Trauma Care Committee.
- Patient and family informational packets are currently a work in progress. Topics will include: mobility, equipment, bowel and bladder, coping, skin care, nutrition, recovery expectations, orientation to the multidisciplinary team, and an overview of their stay at BIDMC. Packets will also include a glossary of relevant terms, a resources page, a health care proxy form, and a welcome letter.

Lessons Learned

- Creating a standard spinal cord injury pathway is a challenge given the variety of causes and presentations that may exist across patients with spinal cord injury.
- Discussion between disciplines allows for a more complete understanding of the wide range of physical and emotional challenges that patients with spinal cord injury face throughout the hospital stage of their recovery.
- Educational materials collected and produced can be used in the hospital to educate the interdisciplinary team on this relatively uncommon type of injury.
- The effectiveness of an informational packet for patients and family is largely dependent on both visual presentation and language geared towards non-medical readers.

Next Steps/What Should Happen Next

- Bring the clinical pathway to Trauma Care Committee for review and approval.
- Complete Patient and Family Spinal Cord Injury Packets.
- Discuss pursuing transfer agreements with rehabilitation centers for patients with spinal cord injury.
- Implement new guidelines and stock patient and family informational packets immediately after receiving final approval.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of all aspects of this project one year after roll out.

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