

Patient Isolation Tied To Dissatisfaction With Care

Patient satisfaction has an increasing impact on hospitals' bottom lines, factoring into Medicare reimbursement of hospital care. A new study finds patients placed in Contact Precautions (Contact Isolation) were twice as likely to report perceived problems with care compared to patients without Contact Precautions, placing the common infection control practice at odds with hospital interests. The study was published in the October issue of *Infection Control and Hospital Epidemiology*, the journal of the Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America.

Contact Precautions are routinely used in hospitals to prevent the spread of drug-resistant bacteria between healthcare workers and patients. Healthcare workers are required to use disposable gowns and gloves for all patient contact when a patient is in Contact Precautions.

"As public reporting of patient satisfaction and patient outcomes becomes a national priority linked to hospital reimbursement, this study provides insight into how healthcare workers must balance evidence-based practice with a focus on patient satisfaction," said Preeti Mehrotra, MD, lead author on the study. "By creating a physical barrier, Contact Precautions may modify how healthcare workers interact with patients, affecting the patient experience and the perception of how care is delivered."

Researchers used a retrospective cohort study of 528 medical and surgical patients, comparing those patients who were placed in Contact Precautions with those who were not in Contact Precautions at the University of Maryland, Medical Center. Each participant underwent a standardized interview at enrollment in the study and on hospital days 3, 7, and 14, or until discharged. After discharge, the standardized interview and Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) survey were administered by telephone for all patients who could be successfully contacted (88 patients).

Based on the standardized interview results, patients for whom Contact Precautions were used were more likely to perceive issues with their care, especially as it related to poor coordination of care and a lack of respect for patient preferences.

The authors suggest interventions should be developed to ensure that all patients, whether placed in Contact Precautions or not, receive the same quality of care. This includes staff education to ensure more patient visits and patient education to help patients understand the reasons for Contact Precautions. Additionally, the researchers recommend starting a dialogue among healthcare management and workers regarding the positive and negative effects of patient isolation procedures.

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Published on Surgical Products (<http://www.surgicalproductsmag.com>)

Source URL (retrieved on 09/18/2014 - 1:27pm):

<http://www.surgicalproductsmag.com/news/2013/09/patient-isolation-tied-dissatisfaction-care>