Improving the management of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease

Sale Hospital Emergency Department

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In February 2015 the Emergency Care Clinical Network began its seventh round of nine-month evidence-based improvement projects in emergency departments. The aim of these projects is to use evidence-based care to reduce unwarranted variation in clinical practice and improve consistency of patient care within emergency departments. Sale Hospital focused on improving the management of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Why this project was important to our emergency department
• There was variation in clinical practice in managing patients with COPD.
• We wanted to ensure care is based on the latest Australian and New Zealand guideline for managing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD X).

What we did
• Developed and implemented a COPD clinical pathway with measurable outcomes.
• Implemented a COPD register to monitor our compliance with the pathway.
• Educated staff before the project began.
• Presented two monthly audit data at staff meetings.

Our results
• The proportion of patients having chest x-ray increased from 91% to 100%.
• The proportion of patients having controlled oxygen therapy decreased from 74% to 43% which may be due to inadequate documentation.
• The proportion of patients receiving bronchodilators was essentially unchanged 84% vs 86%.
• The proportion of patients receiving systemic steroids was essentially unchanged 84% to 80%.
• The proportion of patients receiving antibiotics if signs of infection increased 94% to 100%.
• The proportion of patients having a blood gas (for non-mild disease) unchanged at 100%.
• The proportion of patients with respiratory acidosis receiving non-invasive ventilation (NIV) in post data was 80%.

Impact on patients, staff and the health system
• The management of patients presenting with COPD has been streamlined.
• Staff now have a consistent process to follow in managing patients with COPD.

What we learnt about improving quality of care
• Having an experienced project lead helps make the project successful.
• When only minor changes in care are required it is challenging to maintain staff motivation.
• Getting support from medical staff can be challenging!
• Next time use visual tools, posters and change champions to increase staff engagement.