Using an Acuity Tool to Meet and Maintain a Productivity Benchmark While Adhering to AWHONN Perinatal Guidelines

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Introduction

The art of scheduling perinatal nursing staff in a community hospital is challenging in a specialty where census and acuity are highly unpredictable. This challenge on our Women and Children’s Unit (WMCH) is particularly complex with five specialties: labor and delivery, postpartum/newborn, pediatrics, level two nursery and a cesarean-section operating room.

ORGANIZATION CHALLENGES:

- Decreasing revenue
- Increased cost due to healthcare reform
- Fluctuations in volume & acuity
- Variable reimbursement
- Uncompensated costs

Methods

The WMCH department used the Lean/Six Sigma methodology to improve staff productivity.

DEPARTMENT GOALS:

- Maintain quality care
- Maintain high patient satisfaction
- Staff efficiently for patient census and acuity
- Insure staffing ratios per AWHONN guidelines

WMCH’s staff developed and incorporated an acuity tool into their daily nursing assignment sheet.

The sheet yielded a productivity standard that clearly demonstrated each assignment was appropriate and the unit was staffed safely every 2 hours.

Productivity Timeline

- Baseline: 23 hours
- Improvement: 18 hours
- 6 Months: 18 hours
- 12 Months: 16 hours
- 18 Months: 16 hours

Benefits

- Staffing aligned with guidelines
- Retrospective long-range acuity data
- Productivity data and trending
- Assignments clear and objective
- Nurses confident with their assignment

Conclusions

After six months of using the acuity tool, the department reduced the hours worked per equivalent patient days from 23 to 18.7. This reduction was projected to save $800,000 a year, although actually resulted in hospital savings of $1,300,000.

References