Improving Cancer Pain Management Project – The Challenge of Changing the Clinical Behaviour of Junior Medical Staff

Abstract:

Background: A wide range of studies have found pain is being under-recognised and under treated in acute hospitals [1]. In 2002 the National Institute of Clinical Studies recognised a significant gap in pain management between evidence and current clinical practice [2] arising from barriers at all levels of the therapeutic relationship including patients, clinical staff and the hospital organisations themselves. A recent systematic review of interventions performed thus far to improve this gap concluded that although professional knowledge and attitudes about pain and nursing pain assessment rates have been shown to be improvable, no systematic, hospital-wide intervention has yet to be associated with improvement in pain severity. It was suggested that future research on the development of new interventions, perhaps targeted specifically at physicians, is urgently needed [3]. This project addresses that need.

Initiative: A National Institute of Clinical Studies-Victorian Quality Council fellowship has facilitated the development of a project to improve cancer pain management. Building on previous projects, such as the “Pain as a Fifth Vital Sign” to improve nursing assessment and documentation of pain, this project now focuses on the developing interventions to improve the assessment and prescribing habits of junior medical staff based on evidence based local cancer pain guidelines.

Operation: The project aims to improve practice by understanding current practice development of a dynamic and evolving multilevel intervention to improve cancer pain management at all levels of the therapeutic relationship from the patient, to the clinician, to the organisation. The focus in particular is on clinician and system factors that impact on the clinical behaviour of junior doctors. The project is due for completion in August 2008.

Evaluation: The presentation will explore issues of
- Identified barriers and enablers to changing clinicians behaviour towards cancer pain management at our organisation and strategies employed to overcome these barriers.
- Strategies to implement a local cancer pain guideline particularly focusing on improved cancer pain assessment and prescribing by junior medical officers.
- Outlining lessons learnt about the challenges of being a novice change agent in the area of symptom control in an acute hospital.

References