

Introduction

- The increasing population of older adults and those with cognitive impairment present a growing challenge for acute health services, particularly in maintaining patient safety.
- A common approach taken by hospitals to minimise the risk of clinical incidents in relation to patient safety is to employ staff to provide constant observation of at-risk patients¹.
- Staff employed for constant patient observation are known as patient 'sitters', 'specials', 'carers' or 'companions'^{2, 3}.
- In Australia, the paid companion role is usually undertaken by an assistant in nursing (AIN)⁴.
- Despite the widespread use of AIN companions internationally, the role has been poorly defined, with a lack of a standardised approach to training and job roles⁵, and limited evidence of the benefits².
- Further understanding of companion support of hospitalised older adults through direct observation is needed to inform patient care.

Aim

- To determine the support provided to older adults in hospital by assistant in nursing (AIN) companions.

Methodology

Design

A prospective direct observational audit.

Setting

- Joondalup Health Campus
- Acute metropolitan hospital, Perth, Western Australia
- Over 700 beds providing public and private services

Data Collection

- Direct observation of the AIN companion and their interactions with patients, and the supporting documentation.
- Two medical wards with a high proportion of patients with cognitive impairment
- Observation November to December 2021
- Observation during 0800-1400 Monday - Friday

Audit Tool

The audit criteria related to five key areas:

- AIN companion activity
- Patient activity
- Patient environment
- Documentation related to the companion role
- Visibility of the AIN companion name badge

Analysis

- Descriptive statistical analysis

Results

- 93 observations were completed (54 observations in the morning and 39 in the afternoon)
- 26 observations on one ward and 67 on the other ward.
- Forty nine percent of patients receiving companion support were directly engaged by the companion at the time of the audit.
- The direct patient support focused on diversionary activities (40%) and activities of daily living (36%).
- Figure 1 provides a summary of the key results.



Figure 1: Summary of findings

Conclusions

- There is need for education of AIN companions and the nurses who delegate to AINs to improve patient engagement, completion of the documentation and maintenance of a safe environment.
- Different approaches to companion support in providing diversionary activities could also be explored to enable the AINs to be engaged in other care activities.

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