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Denise Nicole Villanueva

Advisor(s): Saema Khandakar

Increasing the Documented Utilization of Interpreter Services in a Pediatric Inpatient Unit of a Municipal Hospital in New York City: A Quality Improvement Project

Background: Availability of and access to interpreter services (IS) is essential to ensuring quality patient care, especially when serving a diverse patient population. Within the pediatric inpatient unit, IS allow for effective communication with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) patients and caregivers.

Objective: To improve patient-provider communication in the pediatric inpatient unit by increasing the documented use of IS when interacting with LEP patients and their caregivers from a baseline of 40% to 60% in 4 months.

Methods: The Model for Improvement methodology was used. A pre-intervention resident survey was first done. A Pareto chart was constructed from the survey results to identify areas of intervention, with the most common barriers being lack of IS devices and time constraints. A Key Driver Diagram was used to guide change ideas. Four Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles were then conducted. A combination of resident education, technology utilization, and engagement interventions were used for each cycle. Subsequently, two cycles of sustainability monitoring was done. The outcome measure was the documented use of IS on admission notes per cycle. The process measure was the percentage of inpatient unit residents with IS mobile application installed pre- and post-education session.

Results: In cycle 1, documented use of IS on admission notes improved to 55%. Cycles 2, 3, and 4 noted an increase in documented use of IS surpassing the stretch goal (67%, 63%, and 71%, respectively). After the monthly education sessions, median percentage of inpatient unit residents with IS mobile application installed and available to use increased from 42% to 100%.

Conclusions: A quality improvement approach focusing on resident education, technology utilization and engagement effectively improves physician documented use of IS in the pediatric inpatient unit. Increasing the documented use of IS enhances the quality of patient care and patient-provider communication.