Optimizing Acute Asthma Care at the Alberta Children’s Hospital
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BACKGROUND
- Asthma is one of the most common reasons for pediatric hospitalization in Canada.
- Since 2006, the Alberta Children’s Hospital (ACH) has utilized a comprehensive Pediatric Asthma Pathway for emergency department (ED) and inpatient asthma care. An asthma clinical score (PRAM score) is used in the pathway to aid in care decisions.
- Optimal provision of the highest acuity asthma care in the ED and inpatient units (Phase I) is critical to ensuring medical stabilization and smooth progression through the subsequent phases (Phases II and III) toward discharge to home.

Opportunity for Improvement: Clinical staff identified suboptimal adherence to the pathway, suboptimal transitions between phases within the pathway and delays in the admission process for moderate to severe patients.

IMPROVEMENT GOALS
1. Optimize Phase I care
   - Improve transitions from ED to inpatient units
   - Improve transitions from Phase I to Phase II asthma care.
2. Optimize admission process for moderate/severe asthma patients.
3. Explore family perceptions of providing Ventolin to their child while in hospital and the education they receive.

METHODS
An ACH Asthma Collaborative (nurses, physicians, respiratory therapists (RT), and managers) created an Asthma Care Flow Map (see below) and used fishbone diagrams to identify contributing factors for suboptimal asthma pathway transitions and delays in admission of asthma patients.

The cause-and-effect diagrams led to two interventions:
1. Designating a current RT role as the High Acuity Respiratory Therapist (HA-RT) to promote pathway adherence, improve care consistency, and reduce delays in pathway progression.
2. Development of an Emergency Department (ED) admission algorithm to optimize decision-making and reduce delays associated with the admission process.

OUTCOMES
Goal #1: Optimize Phase I Care
Reduced Phase I length of stay (LOS) from 15 hours to 9 hours.

Goal #2: Optimize Admission Process - new admission algorithm
Reduced time to admission order from 8 to 7.1 hours (mean)

Reduced Delays in Phase I to Phase II Transition:
- 50% reduction (76% to 50%) in the proportion of patients with Phase I to II transition delayed after achieving the pathway asthma score that indicates readiness to transition: PRAM <3.
- For patients with a delay from Phase I to II: The length of delay was 50% shorter.

Patients transitioned from Phase I to II with higher PRAM scores; shift continued after the HA-RT pilot.

Balancing Measures:
No increase in Phase I acuity or deterioration post intervention.

Goal #3: Explore Family Perceptions

During this visit, did you give puffers?

- Yes: 80%
- No: 20%

Did you feel this was the right time to give your own medications?

- Yes: 100%
- No: 0%

LESSONS LEARNED
Using Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles, this quality improvement initiative achieved:
- Reduced time in the most intensive phase of asthma care by improved progression of care;
- Improved admission process efficiency; and,
- Understanding that families want to participate in care and appreciate the asthma education received in hospital.

SUSTAINING RESULTS
- HA-RT discontinued, role is part of Unit RT responsibilities;
- Culture change supported by tools (key messaging cards), education and audit feedback to care providers;
- Regular data reporting through an Asthma Dashboard (Tableau);
- Seasonal ‘Asthma Blitz’; and,
- Continue Asthma Collaborative with meetings 3-4 times per year.

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