



Improved Patient Outcomes Through Timely Response to Call Lights

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Objectives

To increase staff awareness and decrease response times to call lights and improve overall patient outcomes and satisfaction.

Introduction

A crucial aspect of effective patient care is prompt response to patient needs. Often times in health care settings, these needs are made known by use of a patient call light. Unfortunately, in many circumstances, these alarms are not answered in a timely fashion or are ignored altogether. This minor lapse in care can lead to detrimental effects when it comes to patient satisfaction, safety, and outcomes. Although to some, the use of a call light may only seem like a simple “ding” or a small light shining above a patient’s door, it is so much more than this. As members of the nursing community, we have a responsibility to ensure that all patients receive quality care; therefore, call lights must be answered promptly. Through our project, we hope to identify the factors that inhibit adequate response time to call lights and improve the efficiency of their use. In addition, we are also aiming to enhance staff perspectives in regard these alarms. It is vital that health care professionals view the call light system as an asset to care rather than an inconvenience.

References

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Review of the Literature

Upon review of the literature, we found that inadequate responses to call lights have a direct detrimental effect upon patient care and satisfaction. Research shows that neglected call lights and clinical alarms are viewed as a significant hazard to patient safety within the clinical care facility. The dangers of unmet call lights include falls, unwarranted incontinence episodes, unnecessary injuries, and general unmet daily needs (Lukasiewicz & Andersson, 2015).

Another identified factor that influences care surrounding call lights is the phenomenon of alarm fatigue. This data explores the idea that nurses are consistently desensitized to alarms and are therefore less likely to respond appropriately. These vital alarms become viewed as more of a hindrance to the nurses prescribed tasks, and therefore become a secondary priority when administering care (Horkan, 2014).

Decreased response to alarms in the hospital setting clearly is dissatisfying to patients. Patient satisfaction is a critical component of effective treatment. Not only is the patient negatively affected, but the hospital suffers as well. Poor patient satisfaction can lead to higher hospital readmission rates therefore yielding increased hospital costs (Dean, 2011).

Agency Protocol

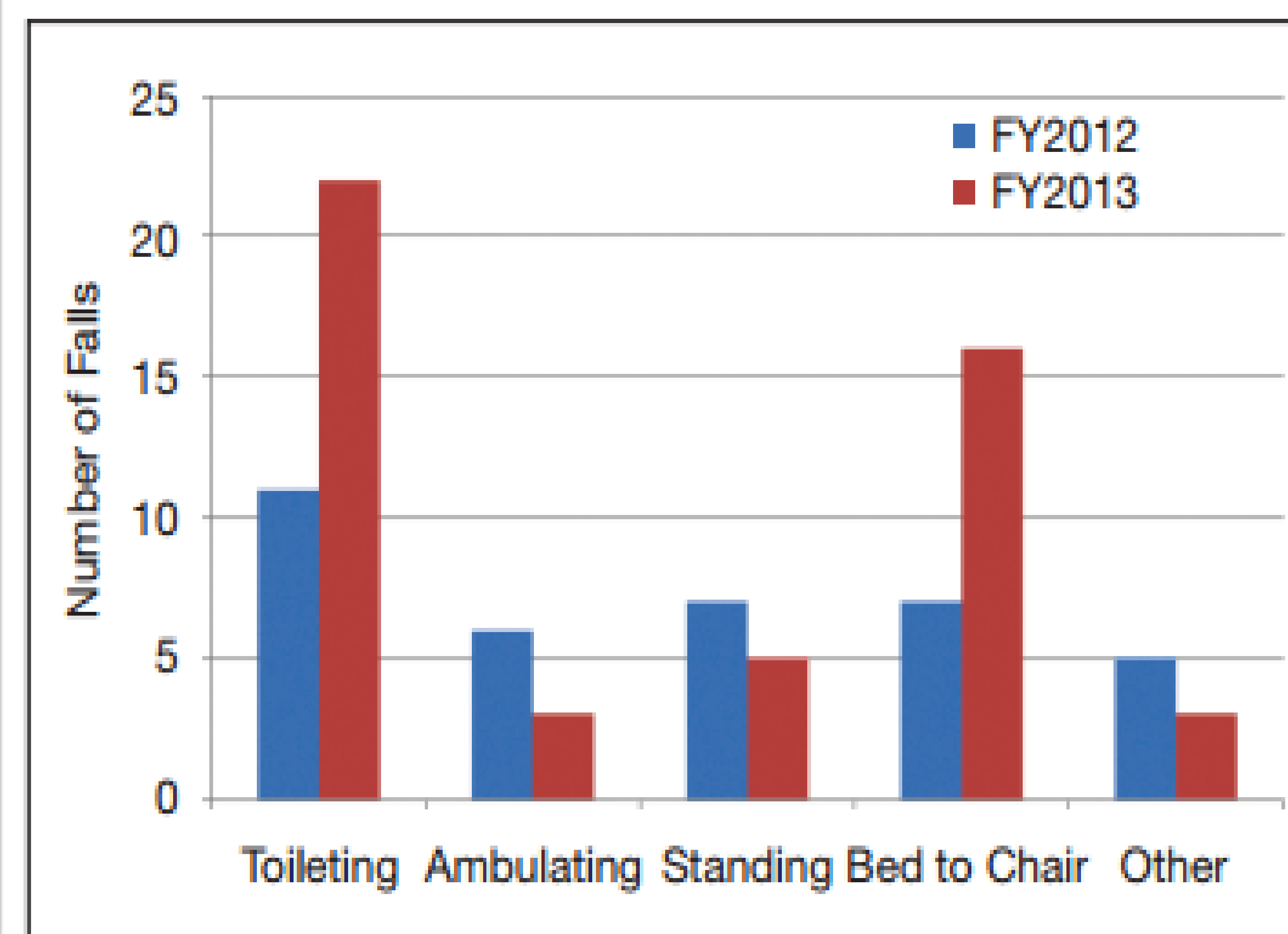
In one Kentucky urban hospital the agency protocol regarding call lights and other clinical alarms was as follows:

- Keep alarms operational and serviced for proper use.
- Ensure audibility of call lights and alarms.
- Staff must be properly trained and educated on proper alarm use.

There are several aspects within this protocol that were neglected that could use dramatic improvement to enhance the effectiveness of the call light system and promote safer and more positive patient outcomes.



Figure 3. Number of Falls During Common Inpatient Activities



Clinical Recommendations

- Ensure that there is a designated staff member to respond to call lights and to report information to necessary staff members.
- Ensure that all alarms are taken seriously, and are viewed as a vital tool in improving patient care.
- Ensure that all call lights are responded to in an appropriate and timely manner regardless of patient assignments.
- Reset call light once the call light has been responded to.
- Distinguish a standardized time frame in which to answer and respond to call lights.
- Enact an hourly rounding system to ensure all needs are met consistently.