

THE Value Initiative

Members in Action: Implement Operational Solutions

Baptist Hospitals of Southeast Texas – Beaumont, TX

Volunteer Pharmacy Courier Program

The AHA's Members in Action series highlights how hospitals and health systems are implementing new value-based strategies to improve health care affordability. This includes work to redesign the delivery system, manage risk and new payment models, improve quality and outcomes, and implement operational solutions.

Overview

In response to frustration by patients, nurses and pharmacy staff regarding timely delivery of medications to nursing units, Baptist Hospitals of Southeast Texas implemented a volunteer pharmacy courier program. The 355-bed hospital does not have a pneumatic tube system for delivering medications, and installing one is cost prohibitive. Approximately 14 volunteers deliver STAT and first-dose non-narcotic medications to nursing units and the emergency department (ED) on morning, afternoon and evening shifts Monday through Friday.

In addition to the regular volunteer onboarding process, which contains most of the training elements for new staff, the pharmacy courier volunteers undergo drug screening and orientation



Volunteer Jim Wells, right, delivers medications to nursing units, allowing nurses to have more time with patients.

Impact

The volunteer pharmacy courier program directly benefits patients including the following:

- Higher patient satisfaction resulting from nurses being able to spend more time at the bedside.
- Decreased wait times for inpatients to receive medication therapy.
- Shorter ED visits.

Results of the program for 2013 through 2017 include:

- Number of deliveries: 60,478.
- Cumulative savings of paid staff time: \$144,826.
- Average annual savings of paid staff time: \$28,965.
- Number of volunteer courier hours: 5,318.

Anecdotally, satisfaction of nursing and pharmacy staff has increased since the program launched.

“The nurses are really happy with the program,” said Aily Liem Powell, PharmD., director of pharmacy. “I don’t know what we would do without the volunteers. I feel like this program has allowed the paid staff to be more productive and use their skills in other areas.”

on safe handling of hazardous drugs, protocol on medication handoffs and instructions on completing the delivery log and delivery.

The volunteer courier position description complies with risk management protocols and the federal Fair Labor Standards Act, which stipulates that volunteer assistance can only supplement – not replace – the work of paid staff.

Lessons Learned

When the program first began as a pilot, nursing and risk management were unaware of the rigorous onboarding and training volunteers undergo. Nurses initially were irritated they had to sign to acknowledge receipt of the medications until they understood patients could receive their medications sooner. The nurses also had to learn that signing for medications did not mean acceptance of any risk – only an indication the medications were delivered.

The courier positions are most suited to active volunteers.

“They put in miles and miles and miles on a four-hour shift,” said Powell, who added that the volunteers’ absence is noted if they are unable to come in. “The staff really miss them when they’re not here.”

Powell treats the volunteers as she does paid staff and includes them in all department social events and special occasions. “We really treat them as part of the family,” she said. “I am a huge advocate for volunteers. They are so essential to our work flow.”

Future Goals

The courier program was one of the first of the hospital’s volunteer services with outcomes data demonstrating the strategic benefit to patient satisfaction of volunteers and paid staff working together, said Vicki Holcombe, director of volunteer services.

“This program has been a real turning point for our volunteer services department in demonstrating value and supporting our patients,” said Holcombe. Other managers have approached her about engaging volunteers in supporting patients as an extension of the workforce so paid staff can spend more time working at the top of their licenses. “Managers see that volunteers can do more than smile, answer phones and cut cake,” said Holcombe.

The courier program may expand to weekend hours, though students are more likely interested in those positions, and their school schedules are a barrier to long-term volunteer commitments.



By delivering medications to nursing units and the emergency department, volunteer Jenny Nguyen helps decrease wait times for patients.

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