Using Outcome Measurement to Capture Complexity in a Specialist Palliative Care Unit.

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Background

The implementation of the OACC (Outcome Assessment & Complexity Collaborative) project has recently commenced in a Specialist Palliative Care Unit (SPCU) 1. ‘Phase of Illness’ is one measure currently in use which identifies a clinically meaningful period in a patient’s condition (Figure 1). Evidence suggests the length of time a patient spends in the unstable phase can adversely affect the patient and family outcome.

Aims

This study aims to examine the phase of illness trajectory of patients admitted to a SPCU in an unstable phase.

Method

A retrospective, cross-sectional study of 50 patient’s records was carried out. A customised excel sheet was created to collect and analyse the data. Patients who were admitted during an unstable phase only, were included in data analysis.

Results

44% of patients were documented as being in an unstable phase on admission to a SPCU. The average admission period was 22 days. The average amount of phase changes during an admission was 10.

100% of the patients admitted in an unstable phase had a documented change of phase within 72 hours (Figure 2). 59% of these patients moved from an unstable phase within 24 hours, entering a ‘Deteriorating’, ‘Stable’ or ‘Dying’ phase (Figure 3). Change of phase is determined by a holistic clinical assessment which considers the needs of the patients and their family.

55% of patients became unstable again during their admission, of these 89% had a documented change of phase within 72 hours. The median number of unstable phases of illness is two. The unstable phase requires urgent intervention and escalation of care with review and change of the plan of care to meet the patient and family’s needs.

Conclusion

The unstable phase has been shown to require intensive review for a short period of time. The use of phase of illness measurement can assist the identification of patient and family need, highlighting the urgency in planning care and consequent resource demand 2.

This study shows patients required ongoing care plan review for new or rapidly escalating issues, thereby, demonstrating the complexity of a SPCU.

References

1. OACC – Outcome Assessment Complexity Collaborative project. UK. 2013