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Preparing a New Crew: Designing ICU Nurse Abdominal Transplant Education for Today's Demands

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# Preparing a New Crew: Designing ICU Nurse Abdominal Transplant Education for Today's Demands

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The 3GH Jacobs Medical/Surgical Intensive Care Unit (3GH ICU) is responsible for caring for the most diverse and varied patient population of all the intensive care units. In 2017, 3GH ICU learned that UC San Diego Health was transitioning the expanding abdominal transplant program from Hillcrest to the new Jacobs Medical Center. This type of population was new to our department; however, the nurses were enthusiastic to learn and provide the highest quality of care to this special transplant community. Teaching and staff development are core values of our system and an integral part of preparing our nurses for this new responsibility. Education and training to prepare for receiving these patients was made a top priority.

The majority of these patients are post-liver transplant, who are often very sick, tenuous patients that require incredibly attentive nursing care as changes in the patient condition can happen rapidly. Due to the significant demands and high acuity of this special patient population, it was determined at the program's inception that, to care for this patient population, nurses would have to successfully complete well-rounded training that included hands-on practice-based learning with equipment, didactic classes, and competency-based orientation at the bedside with another liver transplant-trained nurse preceptor. In advance of the program's move to the La Jolla campus, 3GH staff were asked to sign up for a liver transplant class that was designed and instructed

by transplant surgeons. The surgeon instructors wanted to provide nursing education on what happened in the operating room at time of transplant and what nursing should monitor for after surgery. After completion of the class, the nurse would then sign up to float to Hillcrest Surgical Intensive Care Unit (SICU) to be precepted by a competent SICU nurse on a fresh liver transplant patient as opportunities arose.

Although this required considerable coordination and time, the partnership between SICU and 3GH and its dedicated, proactive nursing staff permitted the successful transition of the abdominal transplant program to the new campus and its eventual incredible growth.

UC San Diego's Liver Transplant program's first year at Jacobs Medical

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Center (2017–2018) saw a successful 34 liver transplants performed and recovered on our unit. Fiscal Year 2018–2019 saw more changes and incredible growth as that number almost doubled, and a record-breaking 4 liver transplant surgeries were accomplished and recovered in a single day!

This increased demand meant 3GH ICU needed many liver-trained nurses. As classes were instructed by transplant surgeons who maintain busy schedules, the limited frequency of classes could not keep up with this markedly increased demand and need for ever-ready liver transplant-competent nurses. 3GH nursing leadership partnered with the liver transplant program to update and reorganize the class to better meet the needs of 3GH nursing staff and

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reflect the changes in what bedside nurses were seeing post-transplant. By making the class nurse-driven, we were able to offer the class quarterly, rather than annually. This allowed the class to be offered more frequently to meet the needs that additional numbers of post-transplant patients created, as well as offer training to newly hired nursing staff, while refreshing knowledge of previously trained nurses. We considered the transplant surgeon presentation an integral part of the class, but wanted to incorporate other members of the multidisciplinary transplant team to deliver more robust information and better prepare the nursing staff for the vital role they play in integrating the knowledge in the patient's care in the inpatient setting.

Classes are now conveniently

offered on the unit in our 3H conference room. Dr. Gabriel Schnickel, Surgical Director of Liver Transplantation, graciously teaches nurses about the history of transplantation. Other instructors include Kim Gross, the Nurse Practitioner for the Transplant Team and often frequent point of contact for our transplant patients and nurses on the ICU. She instructs the staff about Kidney Transplant, specifically, including nursing considerations and fluid management. Mike Misel, Transplant Pharmacist, instructs nurses on the importance of post-transplant medications, including anti-rejection medication and side effects, and considerations for the bedside nurse to keep in mind as they care for these patients and provide bedside education in preparation for discharge. Finally, as the as the nursing educator, I end the class by teaching my home unit about what it actually takes for the clinical nurse to appropriately care for these patients in that critical first few post-surgery days in the ICU. Not only does the class cover the skills and theory of nursing care, but also covers the emotional impact that these patients go through in receiving an often long-awaited for new lease on life with liver transplantation. These patients are sick for the majority of their life. The rollercoaster ride they take waiting for that special phone call when their donor is identified is unimaginable, but important for the nurse to be aware of and understand as they care for these patients and their families at such a life-changing moment in their lives.

Now at nearly the year mark following our re-organization of training, the class has been so successful that our sister unit 4J is initiating a similar training specific to the Progressive Care Unit. 4J (Progressive Care Unit) receives these patients from 3GH-ICU after the patients are no longer critical in need of ICU care and can be safely downgraded. At this point, patient and family education takes front stage as nurses and the transplant team prepares the patient for discharge and

assists the patient in participating and eventually managing their own care.

4J celebrates every transplant patient with a bell ringing ceremony prior to the patient's discharge; this allows the patient to celebrate this significant milestone and gives staff an opportunity to recognize the patient's progress and celebrate happy outcomes. ICU nurses routinely struggle with the burdens of witnessing death, suffering, and chronic debilitating illnesses, the routine causes of an ICU stay. Although often rewarding aspects of nursing care, exposure to death and debilitation carries an emotional toll and can lead to nurse burnout. Participating in transplant offers our nurses a way to care for a patient with a positive reason for ICU stay, as they usually leave better than they came in. 3GH ICU staff have partnered with 4J to participate in the bell ringing ceremony with the rest of the transplant team to wish the patient the best in the next step of their journey. Nurses who have been able to participate reported this has had a positive impact on their well-being. We hope as we continue that 3GH Jacobs ICU nurses see this a celebration of the care they've provided and their contribution, as well.

3GH Leadership and Staff are honored to be a part of the Solid Abdominal Transplant Program. We were honored when Dr. Schnickel, informed our last education session that, "I have worked all over the country and these nurses on 3GH ICU are the best I have ever worked with in taking care of transplant patients." The Transplant Team and 3GH have come far in this journey and continue to work well together to deliver the greatest care to our patients. We feel privileged to be a part of these patients' lives.