



Patient deterioration and recognition and response systems: A factsheet for hospital executives



The Health Quality & Safety Commission (the Commission) has identified significant opportunities to improve the quality and safety of systems for recognising and responding to signs of deterioration among adult patients in New Zealand hospitals.

We need your support to implement the nationally standardised adult vital signs chart, New Zealand early warning score and a localised escalation and response system.

This factsheet describes the recognition and response system. Please go to the Commission's website for more information about this and other work we have planned. www.hqsc.govt.nz/our-programmes/patient-deterioration.

Background

Factors that contribute to failures to recognise or respond to patient deterioration are complex and wide-ranging. They include:

- a lack of formalised systems and processes
- inadequate clinical governance
- a siloed and super-specialised hospital workforce
- problems associated with inadequate clinical knowledge and skills
- suboptimal handover, communication and teamwork
- inconsistent patient, family and whānau engagement
- organisational resource constraints
- competing priorities.(1-4)



What makes an effective recognition and response system?



There is broad agreement about the components necessary for effective recognition and response systems; these components have been mandated as policy in some jurisdictions.

Systems for recognising patient deterioration rely on the use of tools such as paper or electronic vital sign charts with embedded triggers (the New Zealand early warning score) for escalating care based on abnormal measurements.

Escalation and response systems provide a mandatory pathway for getting help from progressively more senior and more skilled responders as a patient's deterioration worsens. These systems enable early intervention, prevent adverse outcomes such as cardiac arrest, and foster a clinical culture of routinely calling for help when needed.

How can you support successful implementation and improvement?



Recognition and response systems must be part of the strategic plan to make a hospital safer (4). If they are to function effectively and be sustainable, systems require clinical, educational and administrative resources.

Recognition and response systems also require a whole-of-hospital approach as they operate across specialty boundaries and at all times of day and days of the week. Visible, collaborative and ongoing executive, clinical, and operational leadership are needed if recognition and response systems are to be resourced adequately and supported, and to function successfully.

How will the Commission support this work?



The Commission is providing a package of tools, guidance and support to help project teams implement and improve recognition and response systems. These include:

- a standardised vital sign chart and New Zealand early warning score
- implementation support
- guidance on developing appropriate localised escalation pathways
- advice about necessary structures for ongoing clinical governance of the system.

Assistance includes providing expert clinical advice, building quality improvement capability in organisations and developing appropriate measures and evaluation strategies.

Want to know more?

To find out more about the national patient deterioration programme, go to:

www.hqsc.govt.nz/our-programmes/patient-deterioration



References

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4. DeVita M, Hillman K, Bellomo R (eds). 2010. *Textbook of Rapid Response Systems: Concept and Implementation*. New York: Springer.