The Power of Commitment: Improved Communication in Critical Cases

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The Power of Commitment

• “Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back...Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now.” - Goethe
Study Objectives

• 1) Define the term critical result.
• 2) Choose the critical results to track.
• 3) Gather baseline data.
• 4) Educate the staff on the importance of reporting a critical result.
• 5) Reassess staff compliance and reinforce the importance of critical result documentation.

Why is Critical Results Reporting Important?

• Identifying the critical result may not be helpful if the information is not communicated to those responsible for treatment decisions.
• The risk of communication errors should be minimized.
Why is Critical Results Reporting Important?

- Joint Commission: nearly 70% of sentinel events are related to communication errors.
- Hospital discharge with results available: primary MD not aware of actionable result in 61% of cases.
- 6th most common claim against radiologists.
- Among the most likely paid claims.

Radiologist Compliance with Institutional Guidelines for Use of Nonroutine Communication of Diagnostic Imaging Results
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Joint Commission

- In 2005, the Joint Commission added “reporting of critical results” to its National Patient Safety Goal.
- The Joint Commission now requires accredited hospitals to have written policies regarding critical results.
- The policy must define what constitutes a critical result, who is responsible for reporting the result and to whom, and must set a time frame for reporting the result.
Defining Critical Results

• Definition: a finding which needs immediate intervention and is life threatening or can result in severe permanent harm.
• Based upon the ACR’s Practice Parameter for the Communication of Diagnostic Imaging Findings.

Critical Results

• No national standard, varies by institution.
• For our department it includes:
  – Tension Pneumothorax
  – Aortic rupture or impending rupture
  – New acute intracranial hemorrhage
  – New intracranial herniation
  – New pneumoperitoneum in a non post-op patient
  – New acute pulmonary embolus
  – Ruptured ectopic pregnancy
  – Cord compression with cord edema
  – New signs of child abuse
  – Misplaced lines and tubes
Our critical result items

1. Pulmonary Embolus
2. Cord Compression with Edema
3. Misplaced Lines and Tubes
   • Chosen in part because they cross sub-specialties and modalities.

Methods

• 109 radiologists participated at multiple hospitals and outpatient sites.
• Data was gathered using a software package, Montage™, that uses natural language processing to identify critical results. The language processing software flags studies that were documented appropriately and those that were not documented appropriately.
• Three radiologists reviewed the cases selected by the software package. Any cases labeled as a critical result that were not a critical result were discarded. In addition, any cases that were incorrectly categorized as communicated or not communicated, were discarded.
• Pre-intervention data was collected for a one month period.
Intervention

- A staff meeting of our entire group was held and pre-intervention documentation was discussed.
- The department discussed the importance of critical value reporting and shared tips regarding communication and documentation.
- The department was told that the active monitoring would continue.
Methods

- For the following two months, reports were monitored on a monthly basis for documented communication.
- The data was presented and discussed at monthly staff meetings.

Pre-Intervention Results

- Baseline Pre-intervention data was gathered in June of 2014:
  - Pulmonary embolus reporting had a compliance of 84%
  - Cord compression with edema reporting had a compliance of 63%
  - Misplaced lines and tubes reporting had a compliance of 55%.
Post-Intervention Results

- Post-intervention data was gathered in August and September of 2014:
  - Pulmonary embolus reporting had a compliance of 94% in August and September.
  - Cord compression with edema reporting had a compliance of 100% in August and 71% in September.
  - Misplaced lines and tubes reporting had a compliance of 76% in August and 77% in September.
Analyzing Pre-Intervention Results

• Analysis of various reasons we were initially not compliant:
  – Disagreement about the definition of a critical result
  – Communication but lack of documentation

How We Improved

• PDSA Cycle
  – Plan
  – Do
  – Study
  – Act
• Frequent repetition of the importance of critical result communication at staff meetings, and commitment by our chairman to improve the communication.
• Feedback on the staff’s performance.
Study Weakness

- Although there were a similar number of cord compression cases tracked each month by Montage™ relative to misplaced lines and tubes and pulmonary embolus, the number of cord compression cases with increased cord signal interpreted as cord edema were significantly fewer.
- The average sample size for cord compression with cord edema was 6 per month, as opposed to 81 per month for acute pulmonary embolus and 97 per month for misplaced lines and tubes.
- This likely contributed to the decline in compliance between August and September.

Further Intervention: Bold Steps

- Although critical result communication documentation had improved significantly, the group was determined to increase compliance further.
- Residents were informed of the project. The importance of communicating critical results was discussed.
- Critical result communication was assigned to our department’s health system website dashboard to publicly show the results and to demonstrate continued improvement.
- Physician outliers were identified on an on-going basis and were contacted directly about the importance of critical value communication and appropriate documentation.
Results 2015

- Pulmonary embolus communication increased from 95% in January to 100% in July.
- Cord compression communication increased from 50% in January to 100% in July.
- Misplaced lines and tube communication increased from 65% in January to 86% in July.
- Aggregate documentation went from 70% in January to 95% in July.
Conclusion

- Defining critical results and recognizing the importance of communication were key initial steps.
- Monitoring performance, giving feedback on performance, and sharing tips regarding communication and documentation improved compliance significantly.
- Placing the results on a website dashboard incentivized staff even further.
- Identifying physician outliers and contacting them about the importance of critical result communication brought compliance to a significantly higher level.