

“A multidisciplinary approach to assessment in disorders of consciousness”

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Background

This quality improvement project originated following concerns raised regarding the inconsistent management of patients presenting with disorders of consciousness. The project aimed to review current assessment practice in light of recent evidence and identify areas for improvement. It aimed to introduce a change in clinical practice by instigating a multidisciplinary approach to assessment for this population.

Method

Recent literature was examined to determine appropriate assessment tools to use with this population in an acute setting. The current pathway of care was defined and key areas of change were identified. A single centre retrospective file audit of previous assessment practice was conducted over a one year period.

Questionnaires were developed to assess current practice in 10 acute and rehabilitation hospitals across the greater Sydney area and the St Vincent’s Health Network. Following analysis of this information, a revised pathway of care was established. A multidisciplinary education package was created and questionnaires were developed to assess learning.

Results

Literary evidence highlights that the Wessex Head Injury Matrix and the Coma Recovery Scale demonstrate strong content validity. Survey results highlighted that several peer hospitals are reviewing practice to develop a multidisciplinary assessment approach. Inconsistent assessment tools are used across acute and rehabilitation hospitals. A significant increase was calculated between pre and post questionnaires, following attendance at the education session. Following initial introduction of the modified pathway, the frequency of daily patient assessment increased from 75% to 95%.

Discussion

The literature highlights that our selected assessment tools demonstrate strong validity to identify subtle changes in disorders of consciousness. This new pathway of care aligns us with peer hospitals use of a multidisciplinary assessment approach. Preliminary results demonstrate an increase in both the multidisciplinary team’s knowledge and engagement in the assessment process for this patient population. Further review of this pathway is currently underway.