Aspiration Prevention: A Matter of Life and Breath

New Hanover Regional Medical Center

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Background
In 2015, NHRMC identified 162 postadmission aspiration events, with 24% mortality related to these events. Upon reviewing the data and processes in place to prevent aspiration, the team realized that the facility had no standard process for managing aspiration risk.

Goal
The goals of this project:
1) Develop a standard process to identify aspiration risk.
2) Standardize the use of the Aspiration Precautions order and link this order to a defined set of interventions.
3) Reduce all cases of aspiration not present on admission and mortality associated with these cases.

Improvement Process
A multidisciplinary workgroup was formed consisting of Nursing, Speech-Language Pathology, Clinical Nutrition, Food and Nutrition Services, and Clinical Informatics. The team developed a standard protocol for identification and management of acute and critical care patients at risk for aspiration. The protocol included initial nursing assessment of risk for aspiration, standardization and optimization of the Aspiration Precautions order set, referral to Speech Pathology for suspected dysphagia, a process for alerting food and nutrition staff, and evidence based interventions for optimal patient care and education.

Results
The primary benefit realized from this performance improvement process was the decrease in both acquired aspiration during hospital stay and associated mortality. The program was initiated in November 2016, with positive results:
- Number of postadmission aspiration events decreased from 162 in 2015 to 154 in 2017.
- Number of deaths associated with aspiration complications decreased by 17.94%, from 39 in 2015 to 32 in 2017.