

West Jefferson Medical Center Eliminates VAP Cases Through Comprehensive Oral Care Program, Saving More than \$750,000

Results

A team of West Jefferson Medical Center clinicians was searching for a performance improvement program that would have a positive impact on their patients. They found no better method than oral care.

In September 2003, West Jefferson implemented a comprehensive oral care program in its Intensive Care and Critical Care units. Within three months, the medical center saw a drop and subsequent elimination of ventilator-associated pneumonia (VAP) in both units.

"We were just looking to cut our VAP cases by half," said Toni Bergeron, R.N., CIC, infection control coordinator at West Jefferson Medical Center. "We never expected the results that we achieved!"

From December 2003 to August 2004, the medical center experienced zero VAP cases. West Jefferson estimates VAP prevention has saved \$520,000 in VAP-associated costs. To date, the hospital estimates a savings of \$760,000.

A Better Way

West Jefferson Medical Center is a 451-bed not-for-profit, community hospital located in Marrero, LA. The regional leader in acute, preventative and rehabilitative health care services for the West Bank of Jefferson Parish and surrounding communities, the medical center also offers a neuro-vascular and acute stroke unit. In addition, its Chief Executive Officer was named 2004 Senior Regent Healthcare Executive of the Year for Louisiana by the American College of Healthcare Executives.

The hospital had been using Sage's products to perform basic oral care (teeth brushing and mouth rinse) and was experiencing a low incidence of VAP. When the Sage representative presented the Toothette® Oral Care Suction System, a more comprehensive approach to oral care, to Bergeron and her colleague, Rebecca Vidrine, MHA, RRT, Director of Respiratory Care at West Jefferson, they were immediately interested.

"We liked what we saw and began developing a plan to adopt a more extensive oral care program," said Bergeron. "We knew the program would be more comprehensive and would require a multidisciplinary team to achieve results and full compliance so we included respiratory therapists."

The hospital created a multidisciplinary VAP team that would lead all oral care efforts and help ensure the initiative's success. The team included the Materials Management Director, Critical Care Clinical Educator, Coronary Care and ICU Nurse Coordinators as well as Bergeron and Vidrine.

"I believe we had the full cooperation of administration and clinical and material management staffs because we involved several people and included representation from several units in the process," said Bergeron.

Having both clinical and material management personnel on the team was key to its success. When the team determined that the new product they wanted to implement would be more costly, they had no problem getting administrative and material management support. They were aware of the research and clinical outcomes that showed the potential success of implementing a comprehensive oral care program and believed spending a little more on supplies to help improve patient outcomes was the right thing to do.

"The cost savings was a byproduct of what we were trying to accomplish," said Bergeron.

Education and Launch

Featuring Sage's clinical education materials, Bergeron and Vidrine coordinated a clinical education program where Nursing coordinated the education and training component of the Nursing staff, and Respiratory Therapists performed oral care on all ventilator patients. Respiratory therapists conduct oral care on patients twice a day, in the morning and in the evening, and Nursing performs the mid-day oral care.

"Our respiratory therapists were very excited about the program," said Bergeron. "To ensure compliance, oral care became a formal part of the Respiratory Care dept.'s policy and a formal protocol was developed."

The VAP team met every two weeks to develop a protocol that would capture support from every unit, including Materials Management and administration. In September 2003, West Jefferson adopted a formal oral care protocol and the team continues to meet periodically to ensure compliance and address any oral-care associated issues that may surface.

Getting it Done

Although the staff expressed minor concerns about finding time in their hectic schedules for oral care procedures, they were very excited about the possibility of improving patients' lives.

Staff compliance with the new protocol was reinforced by patient comments. They said they liked the taste of the solution, and nursing staff reported noticing a physical response from patients when they entered the room to perform oral care. Patients smiled and appeared content and eager to have their mouths cleaned and refreshed.

Staff at West Jefferson enjoys using Sage's complete suction system. Not only is the product easy to use, it also helps patients. In fact, Bergeron believes the system is successful because it makes the patient comfortable, as well as assisting in affecting patient outcomes.

Oral care protocol reminder posters have been developed and are posted in the nurses' stations and in patient rooms. However, Bergeron believes it is faith in the product and the desire to help patients that drives total compliance efforts.

Compliance and determination have helped West Jefferson eliminate VAP incidents, saving \$760,000 in costs associated with VAP and increasing staff pride.

"Our staff sees the benefit of doing oral care and that is the source of their motivation. The program is running itself," adds Bergeron.

Physician support also is helping to spur protocol compliance. In many cases, physicians have praised staff for their efforts and success. In addition, local press coverage in the Times Picayune Newspaper has helped to keep staff on track.

"Through hard work and dedication, the staff at West Jefferson is contributing to a significant decline in hospital-acquired pneumonia, which leads to further improvement in patient care," said William Borron, M.D., pulmonologist and ICU medical director.

Many physicians have asked Bergeron and other hospital staff about the program. These physicians have, in turn, shared the information with their colleagues at other hospitals, spreading the word about the need for a comprehensive oral care program.

The hospital has recognized the program's success and the team's hard work. In August 2004, the team presented the program and its results to the hospital's Board of Directors, which awarded them with the 2004 West Jefferson Medical Center President's Award.

Looking Back

Consistently sharing results with staff is integral to the success of an oral care program. Bergeron credits having a multidisciplinary team as well as sharing oral care responsibilities between nursing and respiratory therapists as key.

"Old-fashioned basic care can have great impact, and this program proves it," said Bergeron. "With all the new technology available today, who would have thought that something as simple as brushing teeth would have such great results?"