Patient access staff at St. Francis Hospital and Medical Center in Hartford, CT, ask these Ebola screening questions at all access points, including pre-registration, call centers, and arrival areas:

- Has the patient traveled outside of the United States in the last 30 days or been exposed to someone who has?
- If “yes,” was travel to Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Liberia, or Sierra Leone?
- Has the patient had contact with a person with known or suspected Ebola virus in the last 30 days?

“Initially, the questions were on a paper form completed by staff, until the IT area was able to add the questions in the software,” says Pat Mulligan, manager of patient access and financial clearance.

Patient access managers provided masks and gloves for patients and staff at arrival areas, to be used if a patient indicates a “yes” response to initial screening questions. Staff follow protocols when patient screening questions indicate a possible risk.

“These include placing the patient in isolation, contacting the hospital infectious disease department, and/or contacting the attending physician,” says Mulligan.

At St. Francis Hospital and Medical Center, a primary concern is ensuring the safety of the staff, says Elizabeth Gauthier, manager of emergency department registration. “We rely on the honesty of all patients when providing basic screening information, when face to face, or when calling to pre-register,” she explains.

The key is for members of the clinical staff and registration staff to communicate openly and accurately, says Gauthier. “Updates in procedures or protocol are disseminated to all staff on all shifts in a timely manner,” she adds.

Schedulers at New Orleans-based Ochsner Health System now screen patients with these questions:

- Symptoms?
- Fever? How long and what temperature? (If Yes — next question.)
- Have you traveled to Sierra Leone, Liberia, or Guinea in the last 21 days? (If Yes — next question)
- Have you been in contact with anyone who has the Ebola virus or who was exposed to the Ebola virus?

If an Ochsner patient says they have traveled outside the country and/or have come in contact with someone with Ebola, schedulers transfer the call to the on-call nurse, saying, “Mr/Mrs. XX, I am going to ask one of our nurses to get on the line with you so that they can assist you with obtaining the proper medical services.”

“We are trying to electronically build our screening questions into our scheduling and registration system, so they will fire at each encounter,” says Dale Beler, CHAM, director of patient access services.

SOURCES

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“WE RELY ON THE HONESTY OF ALL PATIENTS....”