Joint Commission Center for Transforming Healthcare Releases Targeted Solutions Tool for Hand-Off Communications

On June 27, 2012, the Joint Commission Center for Transforming Healthcare launched its newest project in the Targeted Solutions Tool™ (TST) suite: the Hand-off Communications TST. This new tool is designed to help health care organizations avoid communication-related miscues and errors during the process of passing necessary and critical patient information from one caregiver (or team of caregivers) to the next.

Ineffective hand-off communication is recognized as a critical patient safety problem in health care; in fact, an estimated 80% of serious medical errors involve miscommunication between caregivers during the transfer of patients. The hand-off process involves “senders,” those caregivers transmitting patient information and transitioning the care of a patient to the next clinician, and “receivers,” those caregivers who accept the patient information and care of that patient. In addition to causing patient harm, defective hand-offs can lead to delays in treatment, inappropriate treatment, and increased length of stay in the hospital.

**Project Results**

The Center for Transforming Healthcare created the Hand-off Communication TST to measure the effectiveness of hand-offs within an organization or to another facility and to provide solutions to improve performance. The TST is an application that guides health care organizations through a step-by-step process to accurately measure their orga-

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The hand-off communications solutions and list of collaborating hospitals are on the Center website at http://www.centerfortransforminghealthcare.org/assets/4/6/CTH_Hand-off_commun_set_final_2010.pdf. The targeted solutions, which are described using the mnemonic SHARE, address the specific causes of unsuccessful hand-offs. SHARE refers to the following actions:

- **Standardize critical content.** This includes providing details of the patient’s history to the receiver, emphasizing key information about the patient when speaking with the receiver, and synthesizing patient information from separate sources before passing it on to the receiver.

- **Hardwire within your system.** This includes developing standardized forms, tools, and methods (such as checklists); identifying new and existing technologies to help make the hand-off successful; and stating expectations about how to conduct a successful hand-off.

- **Allow opportunity to ask questions.** This includes using critical thinking skills when discussing a patient’s case as well as sharing and receiving information as an interdisciplinary team. Receivers should expect to receive all key information about the patient from the sender. Receivers and senders should scrutinize and question the data, and they should exchange contact information in the event there are any additional questions.

- **Reinforce quality and measurement.** This includes demonstrating leadership commitment to successful hand-offs, such as holding staff accountable, monitoring compliance with use of standardized forms, and using data to determine a systematic approach for improvement.

- **Educate and coach.** This includes organizations teaching staff what constitutes a successful hand-off, standardizing training on how to conduct a hand-off, providing real-time performance feedback to staff, and making successful hand-offs an organizational priority.

All Joint Commission-accredited and certified health care organizations have free access to the TST and hand-off communications solutions via their secure Joint Commission Connect™ extranet. In addition to the Hand-off Communications TST, the Center currently provides targeted solutions for hand hygiene and wrong-site surgery. The Center also plans to add targeted solutions for surgical-site infections, heart failure hospitalizations, safety culture, falls, and other issues.

For more information about the Hand-off Communications project, contact Klaus Nether, MT (ASCP) SV, MMI, master black belt, Center for Transforming Healthcare, at knether@jointcommission.org. For information about the Targeted Solutions Tool, visit the Joint Commission Center for Transforming Healthcare website at http://www.centerfortransforminghealthcare.org or call customer service at 630-792-5800.