

Are We Doing Everything We Can For Malnourished Patients?

- National report using Abbott's quality improvement tool finds many patients receive nutritional screenings but opportunity remains to create post-discharge plans

ABBOTT PARK, Ill., Dec. 8, 2015 /PRNewswire/ -- "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." It's an expression many people are familiar with, reinforcing the importance of good nutrition for a healthy life. But for many older adults at nutritional risk, an apple a day isn't enough. In fact, one in three patients are malnourished when admitted to the hospital, and when illness or injury adds to the equation, malnutrition can get even worse.¹⁻³ According to a new report from Abbott (NYSE: ABT), malnutrition may not be as well-managed in hospitals as it should.

Malnourishment isn't necessarily a lack of food; it's a lack of nutrients. In a hospital setting, malnutrition can delay a patient's recovery time, increase complications, extend length of stay and raise costs.⁴⁻⁹

The new report evaluated data from Abbott's web-based quality improvement tool, eQIP, that hospitals can use to measure and assess its nutrition practices, and identify areas for improvement. The eQIP National Report found that hospitals are screening for malnutrition, but that many patients may not be receiving proper treatment, especially at discharge where few patients received a discharge nutrition recommendation.¹⁰

"Like any illness, identifying malnutrition early is key. Treating it effectively requires a multidisciplinary team approach, using all available resources," said Ellen Royer, M. Ed., RDN, LDN, Food and Nutrition Department, Chicago's Presence St. Joseph Hospital. "I've seen firsthand how malnutrition affects the health and wellbeing of my patients. Intervention by nutrition and clinical team members is crucial to getting them back on the path to good health."

The eQIP National Report was created using data collected from 38 U.S. hospitals and found a majority of patients (91 percent) were screened at admission for malnutrition risk, in compliance with The Joint Commission, an independent organization that accredits and certifies healthcare organizations nationwide. More than a third of patients screened (34 percent) were identified as at-risk of malnutrition. Of those at-risk patients, two thirds received a dietitian consultation (66 percent) or an oral nutrition supplement (65 percent) during their stay. However, the biggest opportunity for improvement was seen in relaying the importance of nutrition to patients once they're home— only six percent of patients received a recommendation at discharge to continue an oral nutritional supplement.¹⁰

Nutrition can be difficult to track and manage, and understanding where the process breaks down makes it even more difficult. With this in mind, Abbott created the eQIP tool to be user-friendly, with auto-reporting capabilities to give healthcare providers clear, interpretable graphs that show process performance and progress over time. With the tool, hospitals will receive reports that will allow their organization to compare its nutrition care processes against national averages.

"People go to the hospital because they're sick or hurt, not because they're malnourished. But the reality is poor nutrition or malnutrition can make their health worse, and it's important to use that time in the hospital to get them on the road to recovery," said Katie Thrush, MS, RD, Clinical Research, Abbott. "That's why the eQIP tool was designed to make the process of nutrition screening and treatment easier for hospitals— so they can continue to provide the best possible care for their patients."

Based on the report findings, hospitals – and the patients they treat – can benefit from reviewing their current nutrition procedures and identifying where the process breaks down, ultimately helping at-risk patients throughout their hospital stay and beyond.

More information on the eQIP National Report and the eQIP tool are available at www.abbottnutrition.com/eqip.

About eQIP and the eQIP National Report:

Abbott's eQIP tool launched in June to provide hospitals an easy way to aggregate data related to nutrition screening, nutritional risk, nutrition intervention, discharge instruction and registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) consults.

The eQIP National Report is the first aggregate data report using eQIP. The report gathered information from 38 eQIP enrolled U.S. hospitals, with data from 44,700 adult hospital patients' (aged 18 years and older) electronic medical records available upon admission through discharge. Data were collected from June through September 2015.

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