PROTECTED MEALTIMES OBSERVATIONAL AUDIT TOOL

The aim of this Observational Audit is to help hospital matron(s) or their delegated staff analyse what goes on at mealtimes in their unit/ward. The outcome will help clinical staff ascertain where improvement is required as evidence of monitoring compliance. This is also requested in the Trust procedural guideline for Protected Mealtimes that a simple annual snap-shot must be undertaken by hospital matrons.

Before You Start the Audit:

- If you have never carried out an observational audit before, think about who within the Trust, you could ask for help e.g. other ward staff that have done this before, practice development nurse(s), audit team, etc.

- To achieve a fair outcome, a minimum of two people are required to carry out this task.

- Identify with whom you wish to carry out this task with you or for you. Make sure that the person(s) understand what you are looking for or at.

- Familiarise yourselves with the general principles of the Trust Protected Mealtimes guidelines and the audit tool. The prompts on this audit tool are a guide therefore you may find it easier to carry out the audit using a blank paper or a form of your own.

- Identify which mealtime(s) you wish to observe and plan carefully to achieve your goal.

- Think about where you will sit in order to carry out the observation. You will need to position yourselves appropriately, so you are able to see and hear easily, but not causing an obstruction.

- Decide if you want staff on the ward to be aware or not aware of what you are doing and why. Be clear with staff about interruptions. If staff are aware of what you are doing then reassure them that you are not there to find fault with them, but simply to get a clearer picture of what happens during mealtimes.

- Think about how you are going to feedback the results of the observation back to the team. Overall impressions, both positive and negative, can be fed back in a general way to the team but some (maybe more personal) issues should be dealt with on one-to-one basis.

- Once you have completed your audit and discussed it with your team, the next step is to formulate your action plan which may involve other teams and professionals as necessary. Remember the aim of the observational audit is to help you examine what happens in your area at mealtimes.
**Carrying out the Observational Audit**  
(Evelyn Prodger and Mhairi Donald, 2003. Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust)

Ask yourself the following questions:
- Do staff organise themselves to take their meal breaks during patient mealtimes?
- Do mealtimes occur during visiting times?
- Are there planned activities that occur during mealtimes (e.g. teaching, ward rounds, handover, student visits)?

1. **Environment**

   Things to consider:
   - Is there a Protected Mealtimes poster, if so, where is it displayed?
   - Space between and around tables/chairs/beds.
   - Can patients reach their tables, and are the tables clean and free from clutter?
   - Are the patient areas free from clutter?
   - Are there any off-putting smells on the ward/cafeteria/canteen, and if so, where are they coming from?
   - What is the noise level and what is the cause of any noise?
   - Is the ward/cafeteria/canteen atmosphere pleasant, relaxed and conducive to eating?

2. **Activities**

   Things to consider:
   - What personnel are on the ward (e.g. doctors, phlebotomists, pharmacists, estates people, visitors, outside contractors, therapists, social workers, care coordinators)?
   - Do those people need to be on the ward (i.e. is it either an emergency, or are they involved with the mealtime)?
   - What are the nursing staff, healthcare assistants and relatives doing?
   - What are the housekeeping staff/ domestic staff/caterers doing?
   - If you have any volunteers, what are they doing?
   - Are the patients and staff aware that it is a mealtime?

3. **Individual**

   Things to consider:
   - Do patients know that a meal is due to be served soon?
   - Are patients asked whether they wanted to eat in the dining area, or at the dining table and are they given assistance to get there, if required?
• Is there an opportunity for patients to wash their hands before the meal was served?
• Are patients positioned in such a way as to enable them to eat safely and promote maximum independence?
• Do patients have appropriate cutlery, napkins, hand wipes, condiments, bibs etc.?
• Are drinks within reach of patients?
• Are patients assisted with eating and drinking if they require help? If so, who is helping them and how long do they wait to be fed?
• Is there any socialisation during mealt ime?

4. Monitoring

Things to consider:
• How are meals served?
• Are patients given choices, respect and dignity?
• Is there evidence of documentation relating to nutrition and hydration being done either at the time or afterwards?
• Is an alternative offered if a meal is not eaten?
• Does the member of staff serving the meal know of the patients’ dietary requirements and were these adhered to?
• Who cleared away the meals?
• Who is monitoring how much patients ate, and how is this fed back to the nurse(s) looking after the patient?

ACTION PLAN

Area Audited: -----------------------------------------

Meal Time Audited (i.e. breakfast, lunch or supper): -----------------------------------------

Date Audited: -----------------------------------------

Name of Auditor: -----------------------------------------

Designation: -----------------------------------------

Name of Auditor: -----------------------------------------

Designation: -----------------------------------------
Associated Documents and References:

- Evelyn Prodger and Mhairi Donald, 2003
  Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust