HCAHPS Improvement Brief: Quiet at Night

5 Ways to Improve Quiet at Night that You May Not Have Tried Yet

You’ve instituted quiet hours, installed cushions on cabinet doors, greased squeaky wheels, monitored noise levels with a yacker tracker, and distributed white noise machines, headphones and guided imagery videos to patients, and STILL your hospital struggles to move the needle on the HCAHPS question “How often was the area around your room quiet at night?” Sounds like it is time for some new approaches to this common challenge. Below are five approaches for improving Quiet at Night that have surprisingly little to do with reducing noise.

1. **Spend the night at the hospital.** We’ve heard of walking in the patients’ shoes, but how about sleeping in their bed? That’s right. Want to understand the experience of patients overnight? Then, spend the night (the entire night) in a patient room. Take note of the sounds you hear, the interruptions you experience, and any other factors that impede your ability to get a good night’s rest. For best results, invite several different team members to complete this exercise on different nights.

2. **Establish that conversations with patients about sleep are more than mere pleasantries; they are part of care planning.** “How did you sleep last night?” is a common question asked of patients every morning. But how often do patients’ responses inform the care patterns for the rest of their hospital stay? This is vital patient information that is too often treated as inconsequential small talk. Enter into these conversations with the intention to better understand patients’ normal sleep patterns and preferences, and to apply that knowledge to individualizing care.

3. **Document sleep goals.** Once we better understand a patient’s customary sleep habits, patterns and routines, as well as how their health condition or the hospitalization may have altered those patterns, we can partner with patients to establish a sleep goal. A sleep goal is a target number of hours or stretch of time the patient can reasonably be supported to experience uninterrupted rest. The care team then collaborates on making the necessary adjustments to meet the target. This may include, for instance, bundling different care tasks to occur at the same time versus interrupting the patient on separate occasions, curbing daytime napping, and/or limiting consumption of certain foods or beverages after a certain hour.
4. **Get patients moving.** It stands to reason that patients who have remained largely sedentary during the day may find that at night, they just can’t sleep. Wide-awake patients, of course, are often attuned to any and all noises, disruptions and interruptions that slumbering patients remain aware of. One way to increase stimulation that will prime patients for more restful sleep at night is to get them moving during the day. For instance, walks around the unit or simple exercises that can be done in the chair or the bed in their room. Accommodations to promote safe patient movement may include handrails attached to the walls, non-skid floors and specially trained volunteers to walk with patients. For patients for whom physical activity is not possible, consider ways to encourage mental stimulation during the day, such as word games and puzzles, and social interaction.

5. **Encourage visitors.** Though it may be counterintuitive to think that the presence of more people could reduce noise, there is a compelling argument to be made. Loved ones are often a source of great comfort for patients. Their presence can help to reduce feelings of anxiety and loneliness that may prevent a patient from getting a good night’s rest. Given this, making overnight accommodations for family makes sense as a strategy to promote restful nights for patients. In fact, when loved ones stay overnight in the patient’s room, not only does it contribute to the patient’s and loved one’s peace of mind, but it may also be reassuring to staff who feel more comfortable closing the patient’s door, which reduces noise exposure. Finally, as addressed above, having visitors keeps patients stimulated during the day, so that they may be more ready for sleep at night.