JCAHO Implements “Tracer” Methodology

OPENING “SILOS”

The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations’ (JCAHO) new Tracer methodology is proving a major challenge for hospitals nationwide. Organizations that function with “silos” of operation, fragmented services, and little alignment among programs and services are finding it difficult to demonstrate “seamless patient flow and service delivery integration,” notes Deborah Grimes, RN, JD, UAB director of JCAHO & Regulatory Affairs.

“Tracer methodology has made a big impact on the way that we prepare for JCAHO surveys. It is critical that everyone in our facility receive training and be ready for questioning from the surveyors,” she says. “Health-care institutions surveyed this year report dozens of physicians were questioned or observed during the survey. It’s more crucial than ever that each and every staff member — from physician leaders to the admissions department — be ready.”

Most intimidating may be that Tracer methodology, and its unpredictable nature, contain the biggest “unknowns”: Which patients will be traced? What questions will surveyors ask? Which divisions will be visited? “With Tracer methodology accounting for up to 90%...” continued on page 2

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SNAPSHOT

February is American Heart Month. Heart disease, the leading mortality cause for Alabamians, has ranked above the national average since 1987. The chart shows Heart Disease Death Rates for the United States and Alabama, 1960-2002.

Heart Disease Death Rates*
United States and Alabama 1960-2002

*Rate per 100,000 population
Source: Alabama Department of Public Health
Prepared by the UABHS Department of Strategic Planning

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NEWSMAKERS

Nowak Is “Outstanding Alumnus”

UAB’s School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics (NS&M) presented its first Outstanding Alumni Awards on January 25 at its Scholarship & Awards Luncheon at the Alys Stephens Center. UAB Health System Chief Planning and Strategy Officer Martin Nowak, a NS&M graduate, nominated by Department of Biology Chair Ken Marion, PhD, was 1 of 3 honorees.

Other recipients were David Brasfield, a graduate of NS&M’s Computer and Information Sciences Department, now president and CEO of Brasfield Technology, and Frank Harrell, PhD, a Mathematics Department graduate who serves as chair of biostatistics at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine. At the luncheon, donors and friends, as well as undergraduate and graduate student scholars, were also recognized.
of the new survey process, staff preparation is key to a successful survey.”

THE NEW PROCESS

Under the new process, surveyors select 8 to 12 active patients and review their care through Tracer methodology, using that individual’s record as a road map to assess and evaluate the organization’s compliance with selected standards and its systems of providing care and services, Grimes continues.

Tracer patients are typically selected from an active patient list; often they have received multiple or complex services. In short, instead of visiting units and programs, surveyors select a number of charts and then follow each patient’s journey through the system, visiting departments involved in the patient’s care. On each unit, surveyors observe care, review policies and procedures, and question patients (with their permission) and staff. The chart-focused journey is designed to make discontinuities apparent.

The best way to prepare, according to Grimes, involves holding mock tracer events and focusing on areas surveyors are likely to scrutinize. Comparing an organization’s strategic areas of priority with patient data enables some insight into the types of patients whom surveyors would likely trace. “Because every patient is unique and every area of care is different, preparing for Tracer surveys can be daunting,” she notes.

In upcoming Synopsis issues, physicians, nurses, and other caregivers will receive mock-patient Tracer examples and possible questions a surveyor might ask.

If problem trends are identified, surveyors issue a Requirement for Improvement. The organization has 90 days from the survey’s end to submit Evidence of Standards Compliance and identify Measures of Success. It will use to assess sustained compliance over time. (After July 1, 2005, the organization will have 45 days from the survey end to submit Evidence of Standards Compliance and to identify Measures of Success.) Four months after approval of the Evidence of Standards Compliance, the organization will submit data on its Measure of Success to demonstrate a track record.

SMITH CELEBRATES 20 YEARS AS FOUNDING EDITOR

2005 marks the 20th year John A. Smith, MD, PhD, MMM, professor and director, Division of Laboratory Medicine, has served as a founding editor of the Current Protocols series, published by J. Wiley & Sons, Inc. In 1985, seven Harvard professors from the departments of Biochemistry & Molecular Pharmacology, Genetics, and Pathology, including Dr. Smith, developed the idea of a loose-leaf, quarterly-updated publication, Current Protocols in Molecular Biology. “We envisioned a laboratory manual to make molecular biology methods available in a step-by-step protocol reproducible by scientists anywhere in the world,” he notes.

At the time, the predominant molecular biology methods text was Molecular Cloning: A Laboratory Manual by Maniatis, Fritsch, and Sambrook. “The static nature of their traditionally published book, coupled with the dynamic nature of molecular biology, provided us with an opportunity to compete and, at the same time, improve publications for novice and expert molecular biologists,” Dr. Smith adds.

Since then, the “Red Book” has become an indispensable reference for molecular biology laboratories worldwide and one of the top earning books in the history of scientific publishing. The Current Protocols series now has expanded to 12 books covering key methods used in other areas of biomedical research (e.g., bioinformatics, cell biology, cytometry, human genetics, immunology, magnetic resonance imaging, neuroscience, nucleic acid chemistry, pharmacology, protein science, and toxicology).

Freeman Joins Neurology

UAB Professor and Chairman of the Department of Neurology Ray L. Watts, MD, announces the appointment of Alan Freeman, MD, as associate professor. Dr. Freeman joins UAB from Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta, where he was assistant professor and associate director of movement disorders.

A graduate of Georgia State University in Atlanta and the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta, Dr. Freeman completed an internal medicine internship at the University of Louisville and a neurology residency and electromyography fellowship at Medical College of Virginia in Richmond. This was followed by a fellowship in movement disorders and motor control at Emory. He is certified by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology and is a member of the American Academy of Neurology and the Movement Disorders Society.

Dr. Freeman’s clinical interests center on movement disorders, including Parkinson disease and botulinum toxin injections for dystonia. His current research focuses on clinical trials for Parkinson disease and dystonia. Dr. Freeman is currently accepting patients at The Kirklin Clinic* and may be reached at 934-0683 for academic and administrative calls and at 801-8986 for patient appointments; e-mail afreema@uab.edu.
FOR RESIDENT PHYSICIANS

Investigation Of Unnatural Deaths

By law, the Jefferson County Coroner/Medical Examiner’s Office must investigate when notified of deaths that occur in Jefferson County in any of the following situations:
- Accidents
- Homicides or suicides
- Cases involving suspicion of criminal violence or criminal neglect
- Suspected criminal abortion
- Sudden unexplained deaths
- Deaths thought to present a hazard to public health
- Cases where a body is altered by fire, decomposition, or other means, precluding visual identification
- Deaths of persons incarcerated in penal institutions.

“In these cases, family authorization for an autopsy by the Coroner’s Office is not required,” says Robert M. Brissie, MD, director of the Division of Forensic Pathology. “To avoid confusion, physicians should not approach families for permission in such cases until the coroner/medical examiner has declined to perform an autopsy.

“It is also important to note that, if an individual is injured as a result of a situation that occurs in Jefferson County and subsequently dies there as a result of that injury, the case still falls under the jurisdiction of the Jefferson County Coroner’s Office,” Dr. Brissie says.

Similarly, if the injury occurs in another county and the person travels to Jefferson County for treatment and subsequently dies in Jefferson County as a result of that injury, the Jefferson County Coroner/Medical Examiner’s Office does not have jurisdiction.

The Jefferson County Coroner/Medical Examiner’s Office conducts its examinations and autopsies at Cooper Green Hospital. “However, in the event a UAB physician desires an autopsy examination to be performed, the Jefferson County Coroner’s Office should be contacted first,” he says. If an autopsy is not authorized by the Coroner’s Office, the body can be released to the university for autopsy following the external examination, if proper authorization has been obtained from next of kin.

Organ donation may still be possible when an autopsy is performed, but physicians should contact the Coroner’s Office at 930-3603 prior to approaching family members, so proper arrangements can be made. “We always try to allow family members to make organ donations,” says Dr. Brissie. “However, our office should be called first. This saves time, as well as a potentially embarrassing situation, if the county cannot allow donation.” For more information on death certificates, visit the SCR Web site, https://scr.hs.uab.edu, click on UAB Health System, and enter “death certificates” in the search box.

26th Annual Reynolds Historical Lecture

Karl Johnson, MD, will present “Viral Hemorrhagic Fevers: From Yellow Jack to Ebola — and Beyond?” on February 18 at 4 PM at the Reynolds Historical Library in the Lister Hill Library of the Health Sciences.

Dr. Johnson is an advisor to state and national health centers on hantavirus, Ebola, and other infectious diseases. He also serves as technical advisor to the governments of Canada, Australia, and the United States in the design and use of high-level containment laboratories for medical and animal disease research.
A native of Brazil, Dr. de Mattos graduated from Colegio Rio de Janeiro and completed his MD degree at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. He completed an internal medicine internship and a nephrology residency in Rio de Janeiro, followed by an internal medicine internship and residency at the University of Miami in Florida. Subsequently, he was a nephrology and transplantation fellow at Oregon Health & Science University in Portland, and he currently is completing a MPH degree in epidemiology and biostatistics from Oregon State University and Portland State University.

Dr. de Mattos joins UAB from Oregon Health & Science University School of Medicine, where he was associate professor of medicine, medical director of the renal-pancreas transplant program, and director of the renal transplantation program at the Portland Veterans Affairs Medical Center. He is certified by the American Board of Internal Medicine, with a subspecialty in nephrology.

In addition to his numerous peer-reviewed publications, book chapters, presentations, and national and international invited lectures, he received the 1992 American College of Physicians Award for Excellence in Medicine (Florida chapter) and was named 1999 Physician of the Year by the National Kidney Foundation of Oregon and Washington. Dr. de Mattos also is on the review board of the American Journal of Transplantation, where he has served since 2000.

Dr. de Mattos’ clinical interest centers on outcomes following kidney and kidney-pancreas transplantation, and his current research focuses on cardiovascular risks and events following transplantation.

He is currently accepting patients at The Kirklin Clinic® and may be reached at 934-6145 for academic and administrative calls and at 934-1801 for patient appointments; e-mail demattos@uab.edu.

ACCOLADES

James P. Stannard, MD, associate professor of surgery, has been elected to the Board of Directors of the Orthopaedic Trauma Association (OTA), effective February 25. Founded in 1978, the OTA, a group of full-time academic traumatologists, seeks to promote excellence in care for the injured patient, through provision of scientific forums and support of musculoskeletal research and education of orthopaedic surgeons and the public.