Delegating Care Roles in Trauma Patient Stabilization

In many emergent medical situations, it helps to have "delegated" team roles in the fast pace that surrounds a critical trauma patient. When a pet parent or a handler has called the clinic to say that their traumatically injured pet or working dog is on its way in, having a game plan and determining team roles can make the stabilization of that patient go smoothly. Including all members of the trauma team, from client service representatives to technicians and clinicians, to assistants and kennel care teams in a quick conversation before the trauma patient arrives at the hospital can help to clarify roles and tasks in these situations, leading to less stress and more confidence in the team goal of taking care of the critical trauma patient.

As a reminder, the material in this article are suggestions that can be used to create better patient outcomes in your own hospital and are adaptable to the environment that you work in. Roles can be fluid, depending on staff numbers, experience, and hospital SOP and policy structures. These suggested roles can easily flex to fit your hospital's way of functioning and can be adjusted for a staff of two or a staff of eight. The key is to make sure communication is happening every step of the way!

Team Lead

This is the person that is guiding the communication part of the stabilization of the patient. This role ensures closed loop communication is occurring, patient primary and secondary survey steps are completed, and that treatments are being carried out. This role can be filled by anyone comfortable with these tasks and not only the clinician in charge of the case.

Recorder

This is the person that is documenting any and all information for the patient in whatever format is used by the hospital: primary and secondary survey exam results, vitals, procedures, treatments and order of treatment priority. Feedback and closed loop communication is a large part of this role to ensure appropriate documentation is occurring.

Runner

This role is responsible for the retrieval of items not available at the crash station. This role communicates with the team in terms of ensuring someone is getting drugs, procedure equipment, and/or communication with other team members not in the room. Other tasks this role might be performing can include: setting up the x-ray machine, entering bloodwork orders, running bedside tests, etc.

Lead Clinician

Depending on the hospital, there can be multiple clinicians involved in the stabilization of a trauma patient. In situations such as these, verbalizing to the team who is the primary clinician on the case can be important to ensure clear communication happens. The role of the lead clinician includes patient exam, diagnosis, testing and procedure requests. The lead clinician is often the one to communicate with the owners about clinical findings and medical plan.

Lead/Procedure Technician

Much like the lead clinician, having an identified lead technician on the case can minimize miscommunication situations. This role can be filled by the team member that is placing catheters, starting fluids, administering drugs, or managing the direct patient care orders from the team.

Patient Monitoring

This role involves someone who always will have their hand on the patient and monitoring its status when it is going through stabilization. Tasks that this role might do include: frequent vital assessments, especially after interventions, restraint of the patient as necessary, ensuring oxygen is being administered, monitoring consciousness level if the patient is sedated or obtunded, and managing patient cleanliness.

Client communicator

This role involves client communication and liaison tasks. While not directly involved with the patient stabilization side of the patient, it is still an important role to determine, as every patient comes with an owner or a handler. Some tasks for this role include: Patient history, signing of consent forms, checking patient and client into the hospital system, giving client patient updates, and answering client questions if needed. While in a number of hospitals, this role might be filled by a client service representative, it is an important role that should not be forgotten and can be performed by anyone on the team.

Resources

https://www.nursingworld.org/content-hub/resources/nursing-leadership/delegation-in-nursing/

Open Resources for Nursing (Open RN); Ernstmeyer K, Christman E, editors. Nursing Management and Professional Concepts [Internet]. 2nd edition. Eau Claire (WI): Chippewa Valley Technical College; 2024. CHAPTER 3, DELEGATION AND SUPERVISION. Available from: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK610432/

https://www.myvmg.com/knowledge-center/the-five-foundations-of-successful-delegation-in-veterinary-practice/

https://www.aaha.org/trends-magazine/november-2023/ht-teamwork-and-disease-management/

https://www.theveterinarynurse.com/content/clinical/the-importance-of-the-team-in-small-animal-cpr