IMPROVING CARE TRANSITIONS FOR NICU GRADUATES PROJECT

Sponsored and directed by the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) and administered by the Ohio Colleges of Medicine Government Resource Center (GRC), the Improving Care Transitions for Neonatal Intensive Care Unit Graduates (“NICU Graduates”) project seeks to implement a three-year quality improvement (QI) initiative to improve the transition from the NICU to home for infants with complex health care needs and/or technology dependence. This QI initiative will target 300 infants over 3 years in select Level III NICUs to enhance practice awareness and care coordination and develop guidelines and identify best practices for a family-centered care approach.

Approximately one in every ten babies born is admitted to the hospital NICU\(^1\). These critical care infants are frequently discharged to home health care; however, recent studies have shown that re-hospitalization rates of premature infants are a growing phenomenon and lead to increased healthcare expenditures\(^2\). Careful family-centered discharge planning and care coordination are essential in improving outcomes for NICU babies and their families as they transition from NICU to home care.

The NICU Graduates project seeks to create a family-centered care approach that seamlessly integrates the transition from NICU to home care to promote the well-being of newborns and families. The specific goals of the project include:

1) Reducing the average NICU length of stay by 10%;
2) Reducing discharge delays to Institutional Level of Home Care by 10%;
3) Reducing unplanned hospital readmissions by 20%; and
4) Improving care coordination for services such as doctors’ visits and immunizations by 10%.

To accomplish these objectives, the NICU Graduates project will collaborate with health care experts, neonatal care serving entities, state health leaders, stakeholders, and families to develop and test a QI toolkit. The QI toolkit will aim to increase adherence to best practices for integrated care coordination and support parents and caregivers by providing family-centered care and education. The toolkit will also aim to: ensure a coordinated transition of care plan; ensure timely and appropriate home care services authorizations and procurement; facilitate a family-centered care approach with a standardized and comprehensive discharge readiness assessment; integrate shared decision making among key neonatal care servicing entities, families and caregivers; and educate, engage and support families throughout the transition to home care processes.

The NICU Graduates project will utilize a quality improvement learning collaborative structure to test the QI toolkit in 12 Level III NICUs. This structure will provide educational opportunities, toolkit implementation technical assistance and rapid cycle data feedback about the toolkit’s impact on improving care. The project will use best practices and lessons learned through the collaborative to refine the QI toolkit. The project will also include an evaluation to assess the initiative’s cost-effectiveness and inform a plan to spread the initiative to additional NICUs in Ohio.

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