

Malnutrition in hospitalized patients – Readily Addressed but Poorly Recognised?

M. Tayyub, E. Keating, E. Barrett, R. Kilcawley, E. Slattery
Department of Gastroenterology, University Hospital Galway, Saolta University
Health Care Group, Galway .

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INTRODUCTION

Malnutrition has a significant impact on length of stay, cost of hospitalization, re-admission and mortality. Despite this it remains poorly recognised by many physicians as a significant contributor to morbidity.

AIM

The objective was to determine how frequently malnutrition was included in a discharge diagnosis (as a surrogate of physician-deemed importance) when an in-hospital diagnosis of malnutrition was made.

METHODS

A retrospective review was performed using the hospital electronic medical record. Medical patients with an in-hospital diagnosis of malnutrition over a 4 month period attending a university teaching hospital were identified and their records were reviewed.

RESULTS

34 patients were diagnosed with malnutrition; of these no patient had malnutrition recorded as primary or secondary diagnosis in their discharge summaries. Average LOS was 11.85 days (shown as category 1 in chart), compared to hospital mean of 5.5 (shown as category 2 in chart). Fourteen (41%) of the discharge summaries mentioned that dietetics has been consulted as inpatient, despite the fact they all were reviewed by dietetics. All patients received some form of nutritional support whilst an inpatient but only 15 received supplementation on discharge prescription. Dietetic follow-up was limited to 2 patients referred to community services.

CONCLUSIONS

Malnutrition is widely recognised as a (potentially reversible) contributor to ill-health. Failure to recognise and address malnutrition has implications for both the patient (with respect to clinical outcomes) and to the institution (documenting a diagnosis of malnutrition would help contribute further to financial case-mix). When diagnosed; malnutrition should be recorded and a comprehensive management plan should be developed to address.

Average length of stay in days of patients with malnourishment vs hospital mean

