

## MDS Alert

### HIT: Could More HIT, Less Face-To-Face Communication Improve Resident Care?

#### High-tech nursing homes have better overall communication, study finds.

If you want to reduce medical errors and improve care quality in your facility, start using more health information technology (HIT) for nurse-to-nurse communications.

So says a study funded by the **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** (CMS) that appeared in the recent issue of the *International Journal of Industrial Ergonomics*. Researchers at the **University of Missouri** observed communication habits among certified nursing assistants (CNAs) in two different nursing homes — one "high-tech" and one "low-tech." The study focused on CNAs' communications with registered nurses (RNs) and licensed practical nurses (LPNs) regarding residents' skin care and pressure ulcers.

#### Why Less Face-to-Face Communication Isn't All That Bad

Researchers discovered that in the high-tech nursing home, where staff relied on HIT for most nurse-to-nurse communications, there was better overall communication than in the low-tech nursing home. But the low-tech facility had more face-to-face, direct interactions, often occurring in centralized locations like the nurses' station, noted **Geralyn Magan** of Washington, D.C.-based **Leading Age**, in a report on the study's findings.

"The [study] authors acknowledge that face-to-face interactions may be preferable in some circumstances," Magan wrote. "However, they also point out that this type of interaction is less than optimal if staff must move physically from one location to another to share information."

"Physically moving from one location to another to communicate information may increase inefficiencies and interruptions in workflow for nursing staff, further contributing to medical errors and reduced care quality," stated a summary of the study's findings by **Jacquelyn Benson** of **Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging** based in Evanston, IL.

#### How HIT Goes Beyond Tech-Driven Interactions

In addition to analyzing observations, the researchers also conducted focus group to explore communication strategies that nurses used in both sites. The better overall communication that researchers found in high-tech nursing homes happened in spite of staff having fewer face-to-face interactions than the low-tech facility.

The focus group findings "indicate that the high IT sophistication home had more robust and integrated communication strategies (both IT and non IT) that may allow for interactions throughout the facility and require less frequent face-to-face interactions between CNAs and RNs or LPNs to verify orders or report patient status," the study authors concluded.

To access the study, "Case Studies of IT Sophistication in Nursing Homes: A Mixed Method Approach to Examine Communication Strategies about Pressure Ulcer Prevention Practices," go to

