

HEADS UP...

TOPIC: *Maintenance of a safe, functional environment*

SETTING: Nursing Care Center (NCC) Program

Why is this important?

A nursing care center's physical space influences patient/resident outcomes, promotes patient safety and may affect patient satisfaction. It is important that a nursing care center establishes a safe and functional environment, one that meets the needs of the patient population and is suitable to the care, treatment, and services provided. It must also meet all federal, state, and local regulations. Interior spaces should provide safety, natural and task lighting, privacy, adequate size and configuration, security, clear access to internal and external doors, noise level control, and spaces that allow for efficient and effective workflow.

Scope of the Problem:

Time period: **October 1, 2021 through September 30, 2022**

Number of full surveys performed: **671**

Number of surveys with findings (all SAFER categories): **151 (23%)**

Relevant standard/EP: EC.02.06.01. The organization establishes and maintains a safe, functional environment. **EP 1.** Interior spaces meet the needs of the patient and resident populations for safety and suitability for the care, treatment, and services provided. Note: Interior spaces contain rehabilitation equipment and activities needed to achieve patients' and residents' goals, but they are arranged in a way that does not compromise the safety of the environment.

Sample survey observations [from surveyor notes] and contributing factors

- The emergency pull cord in the patient room bathroom was wrapped around the pull bar unable to be activated by someone who has fallen and on the floor.
- Stained ceiling tiles in patient/resident care areas. Stained ceiling tiles in a non-patient/resident care area.
- Wall stains in a patient/resident care area. Wall stains in a non-patient/resident care area.
- Peeling paint was noted on the outside door frames to patient/resident rooms.
- In the kitchen there were floor tiles and base boards behind the washing area detached from the wall.

Potential contributing factors

- Patient/resident safety rounds not conducted by clinical personnel.
- Complaints from patients/residents about the physical environment not addressed.
- No system in place for patients/residents to provide feedback on the condition of the physical environment.
- Ceiling tiles, vents, and/or walls were not part of the cleaning and facilities management checklist.
- Lack of communication and/or training of staff (e.g., clinical, environmental services, facilities management).
- Cosmetic changes made to ceiling tiles without addressing the underlying issue that caused the staining (e.g., leaks, etc.).
- Deficiencies in the physical environment were not reported or documented in the manual system used by facilities management personnel.
- Staff did not follow protocol for reporting maintenance needs.
- Lack of established process for responding to physical environment deficiencies.
- Physical environment monitoring activities were not consistently performed by the NCC leadership team.

How to identify potential problems in your organization

Review your policies and procedures

- ☐ Does the organization have an environment of care management plan?
- ☐ Does the environment of care plan include who is responsible for specific tasks related to environmental maintenance? And the required maintenance time frames?
- ☐ Does the environment of care management plan include objectives and performance monitors to ensure a safe and functional environment?
- ☐ Does the organization outline a process to eliminate/minimize risk, including any technology used.

Interview personnel

- ☐ Can personnel discuss processes to eliminate/minimize risk in the physical environment?
- ☐ Can personnel describe how to respond when an environment of care incident occurs?
- ☐ Can personnel discuss the process to report an environment of care incident and/or a safety issue?
- ☐ Have personnel received orientation and training on the physical environment, including incident reporting?
- ☐ Are personnel able to verbalize an understanding of the potential or actual impact of disruptions to a safe, functional environment?
- ☐ Are facilities maintenance personnel able to demonstrate the process they use for addressing and tracking the status of identified or reported issues with the integrity or safety of the physical environment?

Interview patients/residents

- ☐ Are patients/residents able to describe the process for reporting issues with the integrity or safety of the physical environment?
- ☐ How do patients/residents describe the organization's responsiveness to their reports of issues with the integrity or safety of the physical environment?

Assess your environment

- ☐ Does organization leadership and personnel regularly monitor and evaluate the environment (e.g., rounding, unscheduled inspections, and observations)?
- ☐ Are organizational policies regarding the environment of care easily accessible and available for personnel?

Evaluate implementation

- ☐ How does the organization evaluate their environment of care management plans? How often does the organization perform an evaluation? Who participates in the evaluation? Does the organization document the date of evaluations?
- ☐ Are actions taken to address the identified environmental issues?
- ☐ Does the organization include improvements to the built environment in their quality improvement plans?

What are some resources can assist me in mitigating risks in these areas?

- The Joint Commission, [Built Environment](#)
- The Joint Commission, [Sentinel Event Alert 55: Preventing falls and fall related injuries in health care facilities](#)