

White Boards

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White Boards

White boards, also known as care boards or communication boards, are displayed in patient rooms to share pertinent information about the patient and their plan of care. White boards take on many forms, from dry erase boards to digital solutions – either way, an up-to-date white board is proven to enhance communication with patients, family members and members of the care team.

This Improvement Resource provides tips and suggestions for using white boards effectively. While typically found in inpatient rooms, white boards are useful tools for exam rooms in outpatient settings, medical practices, and emergency departments.

What to include on white boards

White boards can be customized for organizations and patient populations. At minimum, display this basic information:

- Current day and date
- Names of care providers
- Information about medication
- Pain management
- Plans for the day
- Needs/assists, such as eyeglasses
- Goals for the day and stay

White boards can also be used to personalize care by displaying information such as patient's preferred name, name of their identified advocate, and anticipated discharge date. Avoid displaying information that compromises the patient's confidentiality; it is best to ask patients what personal information they are comfortable showing. While white boards come in all shapes and sizes, care providers should be careful not to over-populate the board – focus on the most vital information that patients want to know and are willing to share.

Finally, white boards are not meant to replace verbal communication between patients and members of the care team or information from the electronic medical record. Instead, white boards are a tool to enhance communication so patients feel more informed about their care.

Reflection:

- What information should be included on white boards in your organization?
- Should white boards be customized for care settings? If so, how?

White board ownership

White boards are only useful if they are up to date. The frontline nurse, assigned to the patient, should take ownership for updating the board. The board should be viewed as an extension of patient education and communication. If white boards are blank or outdated, it sends a negative message about the quality of care and dedication of the care team.

The task of completing the board can be bundled with other best practices to avoid additional steps and work. For example:

- The white board can be updated at change of shift during bedside shift report. The on-coming and off-going nurses should reference the board during conversations with patients and update the board in the moment.
- The white board should be referenced during multi-disciplinary rounds. The plan of care, discharge date and other information can be confirmed or updated by the assigned nurse participating in the round.
- Frontline nurses can make sure the board is current when they are doing intentional rounding.

Hospital leaders can support frontline nurses by observing the white board during nurse leader rounding and executive rounding. Frontline nurses should receive feedback, right away, if boards are outdated. During daily huddles, nurse leaders should remind nurses of the importance of white boards.

Reflection

- How will you make sure white boards are current for every patient, every shift, even if you use an electronic board?

Everyone benefits from the white board

All members of the care team, such as nurse aides, respiratory therapy, rehab, etc., should be encouraged to pay attention to the board. After all, the board is a way to communicate pain, discharge date, and care plans – all important information that every care provider can use to personalize the care experience.

Reflection

- How will you balance displaying information that is patient-centered and information that is beneficial to members of the care team?

Making white boards more effective

Here are a few tips to make white boards more effective:

- If using a non-electronic board, make sure there is a pen that works attached to the board. Keep extra pens nearby. Make sure members of the care team know where to find new pens.
- Be clear and explicit about the expectation for frontline nurses to own the white board. Together with frontline nurses, fill-in a sample white board so there is clarity regarding expectations.
- Make sure the board is large enough and placed where patients can see and read it from their beds.
- Use plain language when writing on the board, including words and phrases that patients understand and use.
- Engage the appropriate resources so information is written in the patient's preferred language.
- Observe to make sure the boards are completed. Provide timely feedback to frontline nurses about the board.
- Identify and address barriers to completing the board.

Reflection

- What else should you consider to ensure white boards are effective tools to enhance communication with patients?

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