

eKardex: An Interdisciplinary Communication Tool Developed by Nurses, Centered on Patients

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INTRODUCTION

As healthcare systems evolve toward electronic communication and charting systems, nursing staff must adapt to this paradigm shift to ensure excellent patient care delivery. In response to this change, a staff nurse in partnership with the Rehabilitation Nursing Clinical Practice Group (CPG), designed a user-friendly electronic “eKardex” communication system. This system was built on a platform available to interdisciplinary staff across all shifts through a password-protected shared drive. Our CPG researched various components and methods of communication for patient care, and ultimately utilized Microsoft Access to build this communication tool.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

As reported in the Institute Of Medicine’s publication *To Err Is Human: Building a Safer Health System* (Kohn et al, 2000), failure in communication is a contributing factor in costly, preventable medical errors and current healthcare communication systems offer few resources that apply to daily operations using real-time communication strategies.

The Kardex is a communication tool used by nurses for almost a century (Steffen, 2009). It is a system that increases patient safety, advances patient care quality, and improves staff satisfaction through enhancing interdisciplinary communication. An *electronic* Kardex improves health outcomes by reducing communication errors among interdisciplinary staff and providing current patient information across shifts. The primary goal is to ensure excellent patient care through conveying a complete and accurate picture of the patient and their care to the next nurse, therapist, or physician.

TRADITIONAL KARDEX

According to a study by The Joint Commission, communication breakdown was identified as the root cause of more than 60% of 2034 medical errors (Woods, 2006). In many healthcare settings, the nursing kardex is often the only location where information regarding the status of the patient’s care is thoroughly integrated.

The nursing kardex is a vital tool used to communicate primary patient care issues between shifts. Details such as code status, medical history, family dynamics, mobility assistance, nutritional needs, etc. are communicated via the nursing kardex. Changes in patient status are updated during each shift so that the oncoming shift receives an accurate summary of critical patient information.

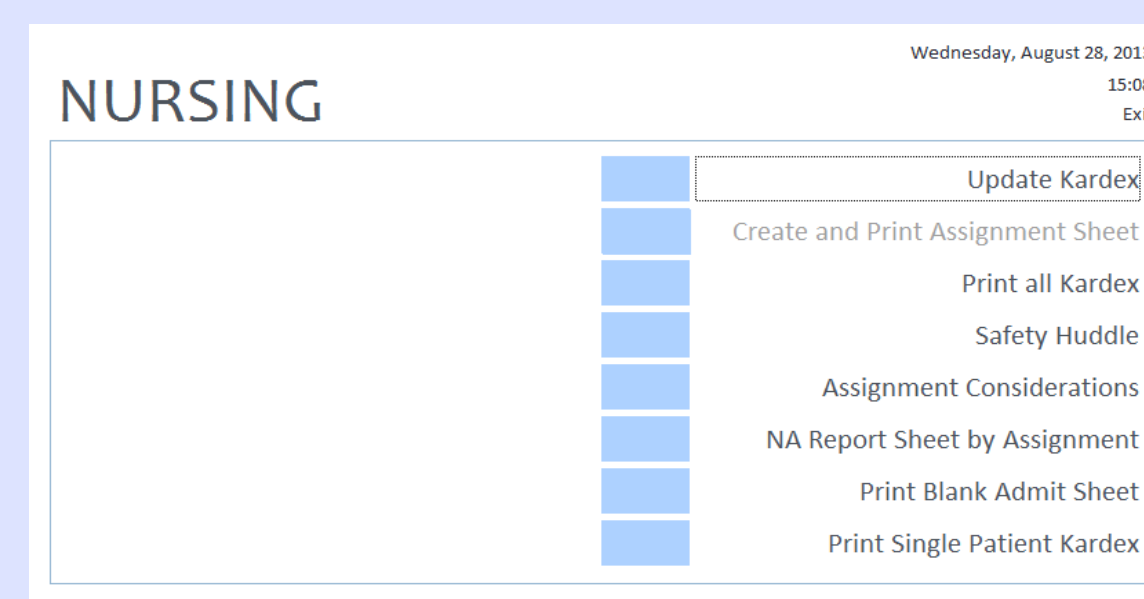
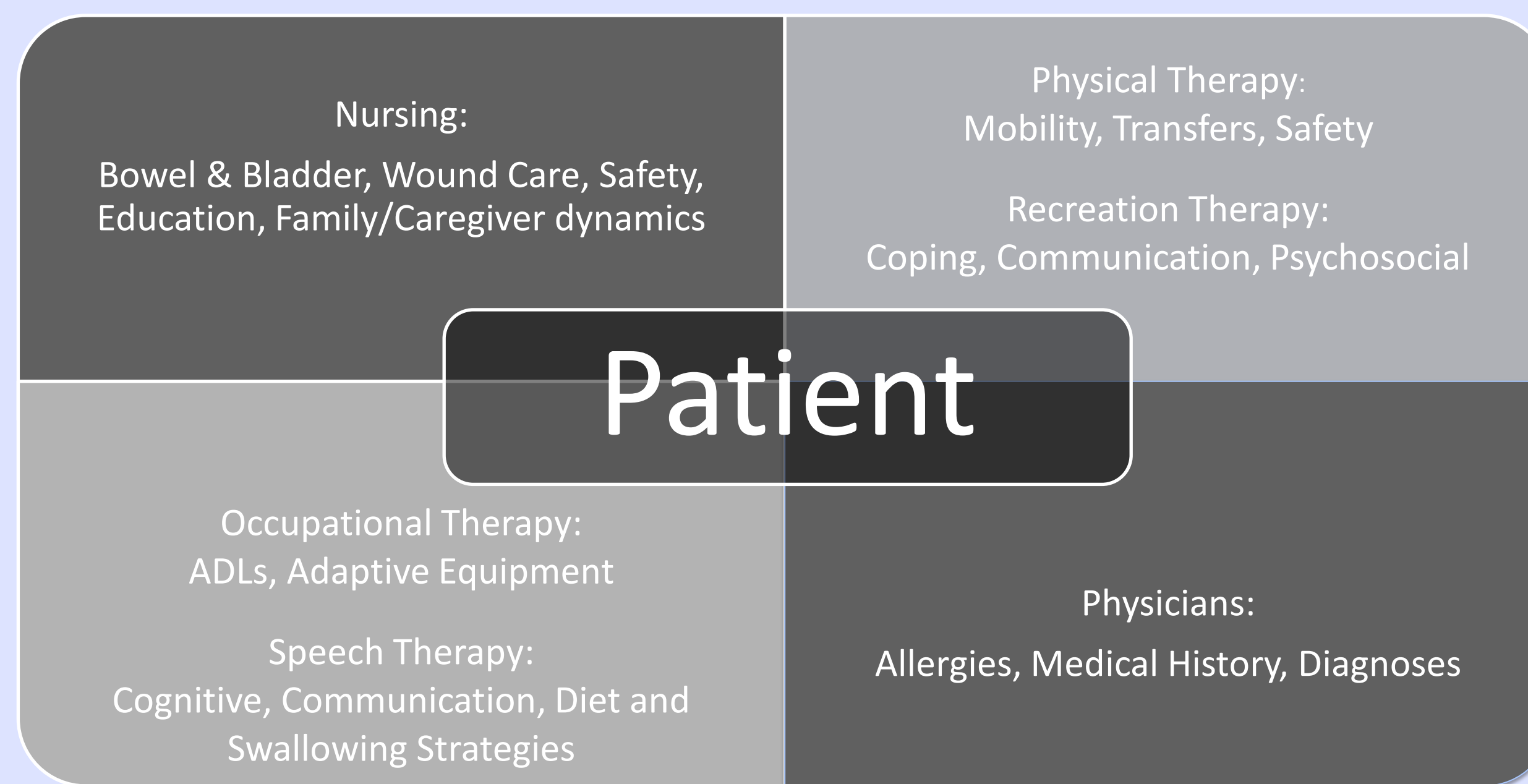
The term “kardex” originally applied to the filing system held centrally on a ward, and continues to be used generically for such centrally held patient record systems (Steffen, 2009). This kardex is traditionally a paper form documenting the interactions of physicians, nurses, and ancillary services. Valuable time is spent copying the disposable record before each shift, causing distractions and delays in shift report. They are typically written in pencil, leading to difficulty in maintaining error free communication.

THERAPY AND TREATMENT SCHEDULES

One of the unique challenges of working in an Inpatient Rehabilitation Center is ensuring that each patient receive three hours of therapy at least five days each week. eKardex enables therapists and nursing staff to successfully comply with the three hour rule by providing a scheduling communication tool that can be updated in advance. Instead of using a centrally located hard copy, the electronic scheduler can be updated by individuals, then viewed and printed by anyone on the unit in real time.

Therapists input patient treatment times the evening prior (or before), and each morning the Health Unit Coordinators (HUC) print a daily schedule for each patient, and master copies to keep in the sign-out log at each station. Also included on these schedules are nursing treatments (i.e. wound vac changes, I&O cath) and neuropsychologist visits.

Nursing staff can more efficiently prioritize and manage their assignment by knowing the therapy schedule at the start of their earlier shift, so patients can be ready for their treatment in a timely manner.



eKARDEX

The eKardex showcases a patient “file” that is updated throughout the shift by nursing and therapy staff. From one homepage, the RNs print out a one-page summary of each patient in their assignment, and the NAs print out a patient group summary featuring the information they identified as most needed in a convenient list. Various reports are produced from this information to streamline communication and aid the charge nurse in developing the assignment.

The eKardex is the primary tool for shift-to-shift report between RNs and NAs, and also provides a scheduling tool for interdisciplinary therapies. The HUCs print and distribute a one-page therapy schedule to the patients each morning and also print out a master schedule so that patients are easily located throughout the day. The eKardex promotes patient safety and consistent care delivery by providing a reliable forum for interdisciplinary communication across all shifts for each patient.

KEY REPORTS

- Safety Huddle – read at each shift report and complies with TJC requirements
- Assignment Considerations – a list of patients with specific needs or who are high acuity
- Call Bell list detailing all the patients with communication needs for the HUC
- List of patients with code words
- Team Conference Report Sheet
- Management Rounding form
- Therapy treatment sheets
- Patient daily therapy schedules
- Master therapy schedule – printed and kept at nursing stations

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Acknowledgements and Contact Information

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