Implementation of Post-Chemotherapy Symptom Management Phone Calls to Decrease Emergency Room Visits and Hospital Admissions

PURPOSE
The focus of this quality improvement project was to pilot a nurse-led follow-up symptom management intervention by proactively calling patients post-chemotherapy to assess whether patients are having any side effects from the treatment. The project sought to decrease the number of emergency room (ER) visits and hospital admissions related to dehydration.

BACKGROUND
As the paradigm of healthcare shifts from the inpatient to outpatient setting, more demands are placed on the patient and family to be able to manage their care at home. Within the oncology patient population, the majority of chemotherapy is administered in an ambulatory clinic, where patients receive treatment and are discharged home the same day. Consequently, it is important for outpatient healthcare providers to thoroughly educate patients about the potential side effects from the drugs and how to manage them, ensuring that patients are being treated effectively in the appropriate level of service. To accomplish this means that patients will need support in the ambulatory setting, so it is key to have an optimal structure and processes in place to allow high quality outpatient care.

METHODOLOGY
The project intervention included orienting and training the nurses to the project and the phone triage process. The patients were called 48-72 hours after receiving the FOLFOX/ FOLFIRI chemotherapy regimen to assess for any symptoms. Changes to the program were employed according to the Plan-Do-Study-Act quality improvement method.

RESULTS
The project demonstrated a statistically significant difference (Chi-square P <0.05) in decreasing the total number of post-chemotherapy ER visits and admissions. ER visits and admissions for dehydration related to the FOLFOX regimen decreased 79% and 75% respectively, compared to the baseline.

IMPLICATIONS
Proactive post-chemotherapy symptom management phone calls increase provider to patient communication and provide support for oncology patients who receive chemotherapy as an outpatient. By preventing ER visits and admissions, the project improved the utilization of appropriate resources, consequently decreasing costs of care and improving quality of care.