A Process to Increase Appropriate Visits in A Medical Oncology Triage Clinic

PURPOSE
The purpose of the project was to minimize inappropriate triage visits while increasing appropriate visits in a Medical Oncology Triage Clinic by implementing a systematic approach to the phone triage process.

BACKGROUND
Acute episodic health issues unrelated to cancer treatment are an inevitable part of the health care of oncology patients receiving active therapy for their cancer treatment. In addition to issues related to cancer therapy, oncology patients call the oncology triage clinic for non-cancer therapy related acute primary care problems when they could be seen in a primary care setting. Consequently, the oncology triage clinic experienced a high number of inappropriate visits that take visit times away from those who need treatment for oncology related illnesses.

Inappropriate visits in the medical oncology triage clinic were identified to be occurring about 55.4% of the time, at baseline with only 44.6% of those being appropriate visits.

METHODOLOGY
The initiative used quality improvement science methodology using Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) cycles. Baseline assessment of 6 months included a chart review to determine the number of inappropriate diagnoses treated as compared to outcome data of number of appropriate visits in the breast clinic.

RESULTS
Weekly chart reviews were conducted to evaluate patient reported problem, duration of problem, and imaging date, if applicable, in relation to the triage appointment. Documentation of appropriate visits at one month were 80% and at month two were 83.3% and finally at month four were 84.4%. These results reflect an increase from the previous appropriate visits of 44.6% at baseline before the intervention.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE
1. Expand the use of phone triage guidelines for triage clinics so that the specific needs of that population are met.
2. Nurses must ensure that proper patient’s conditions are being treated in the appropriate clinical setting.
3. Nursing should standardize processes when there is an opportunity to do so.
4. Successful implementation an achievable and essential change to improve appropriate visits promotes cohesiveness with the clinical nurse staff and advanced practice provider staff and while endorsing other prospective QI projects.