Mitigating Sepsis-Related Diagnostic Delays and Errors Through Improved Communication in the ICU

Implementation Toolkit
Society of Critical Care Medicine Diagnostic Excellence Program

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Background

Diagnostic errors impact nearly 12 million Americans every year.¹

Diagnostic procedures for recognizing sepsis are often delayed, leading to treatment delays.²³

All healthcare professionals involved in the care of critically ill and injured patients with sepsis must prioritize the mitigation of diagnostic delays and errors.

This toolkit is designed to:
- Review factors that contribute to diagnostic delays and errors in the intensive care unit (ICU)
- Provide implementation strategies for mitigating diagnostic delays and errors in the ICU through improved communication
Factors That Contribute to Diagnostic Delays and Errors in the ICU

Many factors contribute to diagnostic delays and errors in the ICU, including organizational factors, clinician factors, patient factors, and interactional factors such as:

1. Coordination of diagnostic information across multiple institutions, departments, and specialties, especially via electronic health records.
2. Communication of diagnostic information between clinicians during handoffs.
3. Management of power differentials and team communication dynamics across provider roles.
Implementation Strategies

Safety practices for addressing diagnostic errors recommend that healthcare organizations implement standard processes for improving communication.⁵

Below is a list of resources and tools, from the above recommendations and from subject matter experts across the Society of Critical Care Medicine (SCCM), that might help you implement these processes in your ICU:

Guides

Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology
SAFER Guide to Clinician Communication
https://www.healthit.gov/sites/default/files/safer/guides/safer_clinician_communication.pdf

SAFER Guide to Test Results Reporting and Follow-Up
https://www.healthit.gov/sites/default/files/safer_test_results_reporting.pdf

Institute for Healthcare Improvement
Closing the Loop: A Guide to Safer Ambulatory Referrals in the EHR Era

Tools

Revised Safer Dx Instrument (see Supplementary Materials)

Safer Dx Checklist (see Supplementary Materials)

Literature

Learn More

SCCM Diagnostic Excellence Program
Using education and technology for accurate and rapid cycle sepsis diagnoses

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References


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