Ryan’s Rule - patient, family and carer escalation

What is Ryan’s Rule?
Ryan's Rule offers patients, their family and/or carer an opportunity to ‘escalate’ their concerns independently when they believe the patient in hospital is getting worse, is not doing as well as expected or who shows behaviour that is not normal for them.

Queensland Health has committed to introducing a patient, family and carer escalation process in response to Ryan Saunders’ death in hospital from toxic shock syndrome caused by a streptococcal infection. Ryan was nearly three years old. His parents tried to raise concerns that he was getting worse but did not feel their concerns were acted on in time. The staff did not know Ryan as well as his mum and dad.

What are the benefits of introducing Ryan’s Rule?
- provides an additional ‘safety net’ for patients, families and carers to escalate their concerns and achieve an independent clinical review
- engages patients, family and carers as part of the healthcare team, fostering better communication
- improves the early detection and management of clinical deterioration
- achieves a swift, independent clinical review in response to unresolved patient, family and carer concerns
- minimises the possibility of events similar to Ryan’s deterioration and death.

Identifying and managing clinical deterioration
The National Safety and Quality Health Service Standard 9 - Recognising and Responding to Clinical Deterioration in Acute Health Care advocates for patient, family and carer involvement in early recognition and response systems. Information provided to patients, families and carers must be in a format that is understandable and meaningful. Patients, family and carers must be enabled to initiate an escalation of care when they are concerned.

Whenever possible, concerns will be resolved at the bedside with the nursing and medical teams. Where this does not occur, Ryan’s Rule allows patients, family and carers to achieve an independent clinical review.

How does Ryan’s Rule work?
The flowchart on page 2 describes how Ryan’s Rule works. There is a dedicated phone line, 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) for patients, family and carers to call. Each facility has nominated phone numbers and positions for the Ryan’s Rule call to be transferred to. A Ryan’s Rule patient brochure and poster describes the process and what the patient, family or carer can expect to happen. Ryan’s Rule is not for making complaints. Staff should ensure that patients, families and carers are familiar with the process and welcome them to communicate any concerns they have.

Supporting information
Improving the identification and management of the deteriorating patient can save lives and can reduce morbidity, length of stay and unplanned intensive care unit (ICU) admissions. Current research supports that use of a patient, family and carer escalation system is judicious with a low volume of calls (two/year to two/month). Van Hooris and Willis found that on average 50 per cent of paediatric patients reviewed under patient, family and carer escalation systems required transfer to an ICU.

Ryan’s Rule flowchart

Step 1 - Nurse/doctor
Patient, family or carer discusses concerns with a nurse and/or doctor.

The nurse/doctor completes a timely clinical review of the patient including a review of all clinical documentation. It is recommended that the patient’s treating team is notified when possible.

Step 2 - Nurse in charge
If the patient, family or carer are not satisfied with the response, they can ask to speak with the nurse in charge of the shift.

The nurse in charge of the shift completes a timely clinical review of the patient including a review of all clinical documentation. It is strongly recommended that the patient’s treating team is notified.

Step 3 - Ryan’s Rule
- If the patient, family or carer are still concerned, they will activate Ryan’s Rule by phoning 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) and requesting a ‘Ryan’s Rule Clinical Review’.
- The 13 HEALTH operator will transfer the call to the appropriate person at the treating hospital.
- A Ryan’s Rule clinician will undertake an independent clinical review of the patient in a timely manner.
- The Ryan’s Rule clinician will continue to escalate their concerns regarding the patient’s clinical deterioration until they (patient/family/clinician) are satisfied this has been adequately managed.

Step 4 - Evaluation
A local evaluation of the review process will be undertaken within 72 hours each time Ryan’s Rule is activated.

Example script for staff to communicate with patients and their family/carer

Welcome to our ward. On admission you received some information about what to do if you notice a worrying change or need urgent help. (Please ensure that the patient, family or carer has a Ryan’s Rule brochure).

1. First - speak with your treating nurse or doctor who may be able to help you to resolve your concerns.

2. If you feel your concerns are not being addressed, ask to speak to the nurse in charge.

3. If you are still worried, you can request a Ryan’s Rule Clinical Review which is an independent review. You can request a Ryan’s Rule Clinical Review by phoning 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84).

We believe that you and your family are an important part of the healthcare team. Please let us know if you are concerned at any time. Please feel free to ask us any questions. We look forward to caring for you and aim to provide the best quality care. We consider you a partner in care.

References:

We would like to acknowledge the ACT Health ‘CARE’ resources and the Clinical Excellence Commission REACH resources in the development of these resources.