Implementation of a Patient Acuity Tool and Safe Staffing Model in an Outpatient Oncology Clinical Trials Unit

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Accurately measuring clinical research acuity ensures patient safety, appropriate staffing, and resource allocation (Brennan et al., 2019; Oncology Nursing Society, 2019). Because of subjective judgment in nurse-created patient assignments, acuity assessments can often vary (DiClemente, 2018). In addition, nurse staffing decisions can be based on financial decisions and acuity tools that may not capture the unique complexities of clinical trial nursing care (Brennan et al., 2019; Leary & Punshon, 2019). Objectively measuring acuity can lead to improved staff satisfaction and care delivery while supporting balanced nursing assignments and resources (DiClemente, 2018; Firestone-Howard et al., 2017; Oncology Nursing Society, 2019).

The Northwestern Medicine Developmental Therapeutics Institute (NMDTI) at Northwestern Memorial Hospital and the Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center of Northwestern University, both in Chicago, Illinois, specialize in performing early phase oncology clinical trials for adult patients. Traditional patient–nurse ratios were 4:1, with no accounting for patient acuity. Based on staff feedback and concerns, a patient acuity tool (PAT) was developed to capture nursing workload and to help establish...