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Nurse Practitioners: Bridging the Gap in Perioperative Care

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Perioperative nurse practitioners (PONPs) continue to provide a vital link in the perioperative arena. While the positive impact of the nurse practitioner in preoperative assessment centers has been identified, the PONP role in the preoperative hospital setting is emerging to bridge the gaps in perioperative care. In 2008, a preoperative assessment center (PAC) opened at an academic medical center, encouraging physicians to send American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) III and ASA IV patients for presurgical evaluation. Almost immediately the PONPs recognized their role in providing a seamless transition between the PAC and the operating room. Patients not seen by the PAC are assessed by the PONP, who is responsible for ordering and reviewing preoperative testing. Even patients evaluated in the PAC may present with issues requiring PONP involvement prior to the start of surgery. PONPs continue to update histories and physicals, provide prompt preoperative management of hypertension and hyper/hypoglycemia, and implement Surgical Care Improvement Project (SCIP) measures ensuring appropriate glucose, antibiotic, and beta-blocker management. In collaboration with the PAC, PONPs provide a continuum of care that is crucial for patient safety, cost reduction, handoff of care, and regulatory compliance/accreditation, as well as facilitate positive patient, nurse, and physician satisfaction. Nurse practitioners working in the perioperative setting identify complex needs of patients; recognize and manage medical, educational, and emotional issues of the surgical patient; and foster a more positive surgical experience for the patient and staff.