Legal Pitfalls in Nursing/By Tina Rae Eskreis

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While reading this article I learned so many things regarding protecting yourself as well as your patient when it comes to accidents and legal actions. It re-emphasized to me that factual documentation is key and should be practiced on a consistent basis. The one thing that really stood out for me was, when instructing a patient to do something that ensures their safety such as “stay in bed,” “do not try and walk or get up without someone to help you,” or if you moved a patient closer to the nurse’s station to keep an eye on them, it should all be documented in the patient’s chart. Therefore, if a fall or accident were to happen because the patient decided to take matters into their own hands, the nurse would have a document to show that she was pro-active in trying to prevent the incidents.

The tips to prevent legal pitfalls were very helpful as well. I was very encouraged to get immediate clarity on any medication order that was questionable, refuse to use a device or equipment that was questionable- I would check with the physician or RN first and monitor and report the patient’s status frequently throughout the shift. I also learned to make sure all orders are completed. It can become a legal issue if you choose to deviate from the physician’s order without a consultation with the RN or Physician.

Communication is key is delivering proper patient care. Good communication techniques can help reduce the risk of incidents that can result in a patient getting hurt or a potential lawsuit. I learned that communication and documentation go hand in hand. Once it is communicated, it should be documented as soon as possible. This article was very helpful for me to understand and value the ethical and legal obligations within the scope of practice of the practical nurse.