Above and Beyond Standardization: The Role of Communication and Teamwork in Patient Handoffs

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Patient handoffs are the transition of patient care from one provider or group of providers to the next (Joint Commission, 2005). Handoffs are important, information rich communication events that are essential for maintaining patient safety (Institute of Medicine, 2000). We sought to understand the role of handoff communication for providers not using a standardized handoff protocol by conducting interviews using semi-structured and ‘think aloud’ protocols with 13 clinicians at a large Midwestern pediatric hospital. We identified several interesting themes in the interviews beyond factual handoff content, including the role of expertise, experience and individual style on how handoffs are conducted.