Surgical Day Care Unit (SDCU) fasting clock – an initiative to reduce prolonged fasting times in elective surgical patients at the Royal Brisbane and Women’s Hospital (RBWH)

Who?
All outpatients presenting to SDCU for elective bariatric and colorectal surgery

When?
Patients can drink clear fluids up until 2 hours before their scheduled elective surgery

What?
Up to 200ml of water, pulp-free juice, cordial or black tea (no milk)

How?
Phone call to patient’s anaesthetist to ask if appropriate to offer clear fluids in SDCU

Why?
Prevent metabolic derangement
Improve patient satisfaction and comfort before surgery

Current evidence
The oral intake of clear fluids is recommended until 2 hours before the induction of anaesthesia

The problem
A pilot audit at RBWH showed that over 65% of patients had prolonged fasting times (more than 6 hours for clear fluids) before an elective colorectal or bariatric surgery.

Fasting clock trial
“Hello Dr Jones (anaesthetist), it’s Jane Bill calling from SDCU. Can we offer Mr Smith some clear fluids this morning while waiting for theatre?”

“Hi Bill, yes the morning list is running late. Please give Mr Smith a cup of water or pulp-free juice now”

22 elective bariatric and colorectal patients were audited over five weeks (18/2/20 to 23/3/20)
- 10 patients (45%) received clear fluids as part of the trial
- Average clear fluid fasting time reduced by 6 hours
- Median thirst score halved (10 being most thirsty)
- No reported list delays or compromise to patient safety

Benefits identified
- Reduced clear fluid fasting time
- Improved thirst score
- Promotes better patient satisfaction
- Safe and achievable

Future directions
Expand fasting clock to include all elective surgical outpatients at RBWH
Trial using calorie-rich clear fluids (i.e. sports drink, pulp-free juice or cordial) to improve hunger scores
Roll out fasting clock concept to other Queensland hospitals

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