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Malnutrition screening tools used for hospitalized children and the role of nurses in nutritional care

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For child patients, malnutrition is a significant problem during the admission and hospitalization process. In hospitalized children, worsening nutritional status and malnutrition may lead to some negative results such as muscle loss, deterioration in wound healing, prolonged hospital stay, and an increased morbidity and mortality. The early detection and treatment of malnutrition, and even the prevention of it before it develops is highly important in reducing morbidity and mortality of children in hospitals. European Society for Clinical Nutrition and Metabolism (ESPEN), American Society for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition (ASPEN) and European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (ESPGHAN) recommend the use of a fast and simple nutritional screening tool to be used to identify patients who are at risk in terms of nutrition. Assessing nutrition using this screening tool is particularly significant for hospitalized children who are at risk in terms of nutrition and it allows for early detection of malnutrition, prevention of short and long term consequences of malnutrition and timely treatment. The primary users of these screening methods are nurses, who are obliged to undertake important care practices during the stages of comprehensive nutritional assessment, giving and terminating the necessary nutritional support starting from the hospitalization process. Nurses have important responsibilities during follow-up of patients and record nutrition related complications. These responsibilities include assessment of the nutritional status in patients, initiating, and maintaining the nutritional support, implementing nutritional protocols, preventing and early detection of enteral/parenteral complications, and delivering medications to patients in order to fulfill the routine care activities.