

Impact Of Medication Errors On Patient Safety

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The field of healthcare is not as safe as it is expected to be as a sizable number of unhealthy populations are harmed due to the adverse events attributable to medical errors as a leading cause of injury and death. There is a substantial body of evidence present in the field of healthcare that points to people dying in hospitals due to medical-related errors. It is reported that the causes of death in the United States as a result of medicine-related errors exceed the deaths attributable to AIDS, motorcycle or vehicle accidents, or Breast Cancer each year. As medication-related errors do occur in hospitals, they are preventable and do not always result in death or actual harm if dealt with properly. However, when these errors result in harm, they appear to be costly, leading to the patient's death (Bates et al., 1997). This essay seeks to evaluate medicine-related errors as common errors in the medical field that sometimes become detrimental when they result in actual harm, how they are caused, what preventable measures should be taken, and the recommendations to fix them.

Drug/Medication-related Error

A medication-related error that could result in serious injury or death occurs infrequently, although an increased number of people are affected due to the adverse reactions of different medications. This error in the field of healthcare is referred to as mislabeling a medicinal laboratory specimen that is assigned to the wrong patient in the hospital at a subsequent time or sometimes administering the dose of a drug to the patient without knowing his/her medical background who might have a known allergy to that medication (Bates et al., 1997). This error frequently occurs in hospitals due to negligence or bad patient care conditions, but also sometimes in out-of-hospital settings, and only a substantial number of hospital patients get affected and are attributable to serious harm while experiencing a drug-related error. Sometimes, the situation cannot be attributed to a medical error because a patient might not have any prior history of allergic reaction to an antibiotic or certain medication. However, the error would be attributed on the part of any healthcare provider, whether he/she is a doctor, nurse, or hospital administrator, if a patient has a history of documented allergic reactions that subsequently result in medical intervention, sometimes leading to the patient's death. Thus, miscommunication between the patient and the one who prescribed medicine can result in serious side effects or often in actual harm.

Causes of Medication-related Errors

The real causes that cause most of the harm, sometimes both to the patient as well as hospital

authorities, arise from overcrowding of the patients, poor training and the way care is coordinated, health workers' fatigue, lack of patient medication counselling, and staff shortage. Medication errors can also be caused by wrong information given to patients suffering from coronary diseases such as cardiovascular problems, high blood pressure, diabetes, etc. while prescribing an antibiotic or a drug to the patient. All these shortcomings combined or any of these affect the understanding of the disease, prescribing and dispensing of the medicine, neglect of allergic reactions' history, and monitoring of the medicine consumption (Bates, 1997). These challenges then subsequently result in severe harm due to inappropriate medication use, frequently leading to a severe disability or even death.

Preventable Measures

Some of the ways through which medication errors can be prevented are curated as follows:

Patient Education

Patient education is one of the key milestones that should be considered to ensure safe patient care delivery. For this to be achieved in the hospital setting, both the caregiver and the patient need to acquire the necessary knowledge about the administration and handling of the medication dose to ensure safe medication use. Patients or their attendees should understand the important pieces of information about each medication they are prescribed. Caregivers, as well as patients, need to understand that a well-informed and educated patient can be the advocator of his own safety (Cohen, 2000).

Identification of the Drug Allergy

This challenge requires open communication between the caregiver and the patient to delve into the history of documented known allergic reactions to any type of medication. It is also possible that a patient is allergic to a drug, but his former caregiver has forgotten to record it. Therefore, a healthcare worker should ask his patient and verify the patient's known drug allergies before starting a new medication. Besides, a healthcare provider, while documenting a patient's allergies, should avoid using abbreviations because they can be easily misunderstood and misread by any other caregiver (Cohen, 2000).

Recommendations to Fix Drug-related Medical Errors

The following are the recommendations that should be incorporated by caregivers and hospital

authorities to fix medication-related errors and promote safe medication use.

Innovations to Promote Safety

Innovation in any arena brings reforms, so its importance should also be considered in healthcare. Barcode and automated fill procedures should be introduced to provide adequate labelling and storage of the drugs on the shelves of hospital pharmacies. Caregivers should have the know-how of adequate usage of computer applications to research the purpose of use and possible side effects of each medication through authentic virtual means (Agrawal, 2009).

Propose Container Labels

In order to minimize confusion while dispensing medication, healthcare providers must use container labels so that caregivers, as well as patients, can prescribe and consume the right drug product. Labels for different strengths of medication, such as 5 mg, 10 mg, 20 mg, etc., should be used to differentiate the amount of dose with the help of simulated prescriptions to minimize the medication-related errors associated with product labelling and strength confusion (Agrawal, 2009).

In conclusion, it is important for a caregiver in the hospital setting to ensure that the patient gets the right dose of any medication if he is not developing any allergic reaction to it at the right time in the right way to prevent medication-related errors, saving people from serious harm and even death.

References

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