

Improving the governance of medication safety – King’s PSSQ project summary

Overview:-

Getting medication right is an important part of high quality, safe care in hospitals; but it is a complex matter. Different professionals are involved in deciding what doses of which drugs a patient needs, preparing or storing them, administering them to patients and checking their effects. The scope for human error is significant.

The ways of ensuring a hospital is run safely and effectively - including medication safety and quality assurance meetings, policies and targets, and professional standards - are known as ‘organisational governance’. Making sure that medication is used safely and errors are minimised (and flagged up and learned from when they do occur) is a part of good governance. We wanted to look at what affects the governance of medication and how to improve drug safety on the wards.

With the help of a senior pharmacist, we developed a medication safety scorecard and recorded how well drugs were being handled in three wards of a London teaching hospital. The scorecard charts, for example, whether allergies are being noted on patients’ drugs charts, how a patient’s own drugs are stored, whether medication is being properly labelled and locked away in the right places, and whether all the drugs prescribed for a patient are administered. Senior colleagues regularly reported the findings to ward staff.

Our emerging findings are that:-

- Some measures of medication safety (as shown by the scorecard results) have improved since we introduced the scorecard - although it’s too early to say if it’s as a direct result of the scorecard.
- Our scorecard offers an extensive checklist of drug safety criteria - some commonly used, some less so - that can be used by other hospitals.
- Ward managers and consultants find giving feedback using the scorecard quick, easy and useful: “The scorecard was a very easy tool to use to give feedback and it didn’t take long to give feedback,” said one ward sister.
- Frontline staff find the feedback helps raise awareness and vigilance over drug safety on the ward: “That information we got from our manager is still in my head today,” commented one nurse.

The next steps we are taking are to:-

- Analyse whether the scorecard has affected the systems that govern drugs safety on the wards and further up the organisation (for example, at governance meetings).
- Refine the scorecard so that it becomes a truly workable tool that busy NHS employees - be they junior doctors, nurses or ward managers - can use to check and improve safety on their wards.
- Begin similar work in another teaching hospital.