

Reducing medication errors and improving patient outcomes

With Americans living longer, the average stay in a long-term care facility has increased up to 835 days, per the CDC. However, more important than the length of stay is the quality of health and care while patients are in residence. Patient outcomes are affected by several factors, but one of the biggest contributors to poor outcomes and readmission is errors with medication prescription and fulfillment.

Leading Causes of Medication Errors

While medications are intended to prevent or treat illness, they also hold the potential to cause harm when taken incorrectly. Medication errors in long-term care facilities can occur at various stages of the medication process, including:

- **Prescribing:** Errors during the prescribing stage include ordering inappropriate medications or those that can cause unintended harm from drug-drug or drug-disease interactions.
- **Administration:** Whether due to time pressures, interruptions, lack of education, or other factors, administration errors include giving a resident medication in the wrong dose or at the wrong time or date, including skipped doses.
- **Monitoring:** Failure to monitor and identify common negative side-effects in residents can lead to continuation of medications despite the adverse effects, and delay medical intervention.

The frequency of medication errors also increases with the presence of certain risk factors, such as use of high-alert medications. Polypharmacy also increases the chance of adverse drug-to-drug interactions, overdoses, and complications. Patient transfers are another leading contributor of errors, with up to 31 percent of residents experiencing a medication error during transitions of care.



Optimizing Systems for Improved Outcomes

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality estimates that about half of adverse drug events are preventable. Addressing the risk for medication errors in long-term care facilities starts with establishing systems and procedures to eliminate the potential for harm. Organizations should review their processes and take steps towards improved medication management by leveraging available assets, including:

- **Training:** Since many errors stem from human factors, it is critical that organizations train staff properly on safe medication management, and introduce tools for reducing errors during administration.
- **Pharmacists:** Pharmacists should play a central role in reducing medication errors and optimizing resident response to therapies for improved patient outcomes.
- **Technology:** Advanced systems, such as computerized order entry and EMR integration, as well as automatic dispensing cabinets, can improve care coordination, communication and safety.
- **Medication Reconciliation:** To prevent medication discrepancies, clinical workflows should be implemented for comparing and verifying the accuracy of medication information upon admission, throughout a stay and at discharge.

With various factors involved in resident care, combining these strategies in a meaningful and tactical approach can have a significant impact on medication accuracy and patient outcomes.

Vulnerable populations are at serious risk of harm from medication errors. But proper steps can reduce the likelihood of adverse events. PharMerica can help you deliver better care and improve your outcomes. Contact us at info@PharMerica.com or 800-564-1640 to learn more.