

Ease Nursing Woes with these Med Pass Tips

Med pass is among the top issues keeping nurses awake at night. With staff shortages and high turnover, many nurses – including DONs – have to do double duty and find themselves spending much more time on this task than they want or should. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid guidance for surveyors on med pass adds to the pressure cooker.

Quality care, including accurate and appropriate medications, is a priority nurses share. However, they often face problems like omissions or missing medication. “This might be because the facility hasn’t yet reordered a medication or it’s hung up in the prior authorization process,” said Jovanna Weeks, LPN, Senior Nurse Consultant, NCS Quality Department, PharMerica. “We even get feedback from nurses that some over-the-counter meds aren’t available when they need them.”

Another common issue is that medications are crushed to make them easier to take when they are on a Do Not Crush list. “Nurses are concerned about getting medications to patients safely; but when they are running behind schedule and/or overextended, these kinds of errors can happen,” Weeks noted.

Like everything else in long-term care, medication management, including med pass, is a team endeavor. Here are 5 team strategies that can help your facility hit a goal of medication accuracy and safety:

1. Work with the pharmacist to conduct reviews and identify charting omissions. During the medication regimen review, this is an opportunity to identify issues such as duplicate medications and drugs that are no longer necessary or appropriate. The pharmacist also can identify things like medications on the ‘Do Not Crush’ list and check that medications are being administered at the right time and circumstances (e.g., with food or before meals). “The pharmacist can identify weaknesses in the system and address them promptly,” said Weeks.



2. Identify inefficiencies in the med pass process. Particularly when staffing is tight, a nurse may be running from one place to another trying to handle med pass. Working with the pharmacist and other team members, they can look at ways to increase efficiencies – and save steps. These may include changing the timing of dosages (when possible and appropriate), considering alternative medications that can be given once a day instead of 2-3 times day and looking for the easiest formulation of medications (e.g. substituting drugs in liquid form instead of crushed for residents with difficulties swallowing). The nurse and pharmacist can also coordinate to see if there are ways they can avoid going back and forth between units or floors in the course of med pass.

Ease Nursing Woes with these Med Pass Tips Cont.

- 3. Make sure everyone has the education they need.** This may seem like a no-brainer, but team members often don't realize that they may not have important information or training. At the same time, people may hesitate to admit that they don't understand something or that they need guidance. Start by asking nurses and others what education they would like, what concerns or problems they have with med pass, and where they see problems arising. Integrate this feedback into training and onboarding programs. Elsewhere, the pharmacist, in conjunction with the facility, can conduct med pass audits and analyze systems and make sure medication processes are in place and working. "Share data with everyone, including frontline workers, and communicate information about process improvements that take place," said Weeks.
- 4. Ensure a person-centered med pass process.** Ultimately, med pass is all about the resident. Their preferences should be considered every step of the way. For instance, do you have to wake up residents who like to sleep late to administer meds? Is it necessary to use insulin that requires regular finger sticks? Do they not like the taste of a liquid? Resident input can help make med pass easier and improve adherence.
- 5. Make improving med pass an ongoing effort.** "Keep communication open. This isn't a one-and-done thing," Weeks said. Look at data including turnover rates and what people say about med pass at exit interviews. Consider developing QAPI projects around med pass and medication management. Ensure staff have a way to reach the pharmacy with questions or concerns any time 24/7. Encourage nurse consultants and pharmacists to leave information and literature about inhalers, eye drops, etc., for staff to refer to when they need it. Make sure every nurse has a 'Do Not Crush' list and other information.

It is important to create and maintain a culture where everyone understands med pass and the importance of ensuring it is accurate, timely, safe, and efficient. Additionally, staff need to feel comfortable reporting concerns, problems, or errors related to med pass without fear of being penalized.

When med pass is a team activity that everyone embraces, the whole team – but especially nurses – can sleep better at night.