



Improve Collaboration for Better Medication Management, Despite Staffing Shortages

Medication management is challenging enough in the best of times. With staffing shortages and nurses feeling stressed out and overwhelmed, it is more difficult than ever now. Part of the challenge is that nurses often don't have the training and education about medications to identify side effects, adverse reactions, or other issues. At the same time, they generally don't feel like they have enough time to do an efficient med pass while handling all their other tasks.

Better Collaboration Through Communication, Teamwork, Efficiency

There are solutions, and a promising one is improved team collaboration, with the resident at the center and the consultant pharmacist as a key team member. Here are tips for collaborative efforts that can result in better medication management:

- **Bridge gaps in experience.** "It's a no brainer. If you are less experienced, you are more prone to make errors," said Marti Wdowicki, director of clinical operations-south at PharMerica. While there is no substitute for experience, consistent, ongoing training is key, along with solid and well communicated processes. This should address all the basics but place special focus on complex, high-risk medications and issues that have problematic in the past or have resulted in survey citations. Team leaders should seek input from nurses regarding their concerns, what medication management issues keep them awake at night, and where they want or need additional training.
- **Get and keep everyone on the same page.** "There is a need for consistency in collaboration between medical professionals," said T.J. Griffin, chief pharmacy officer at PharMerica. This requires a consistent format for communication as well as fostering teamwork among the prescriber, pharmacist, nurses, and others. This is not only important for effective medication management, but it also helps build processes, checklists, and other tools that make it easier to identify medication-related issues promptly, Griffin observed. He stressed the importance of training nurses on using the electronic medical record to promote faster, safer med pass.
- **Use technology selectively.** There's been an explosion in technological innovations in recent years. These offer a variety of solutions and capabilities, but it is important to prioritize technology that is designed to address the specific issues, concerns, and needs you have. "You should be strategically using technology in ways that are effective and easy for staff to implement in their current workflow," said Griffin. For instance, he said that if eMARs put out reminders or alerts, make sure staff know how to respond to these.
- **Re-evaluate onboarding.** "You need to incorporate all issues surrounding medication management in onboarding without overwhelming new staff," suggested Wdowicki. Arrange for training in manageable bites. It may be tempting to have new staff hit the ground running with med pass. However, even if they have some experience, this "trial by fire" isn't the safest or most effective approach. Instead, it is best to train them on the most important elements first ease them into the med pass process – perhaps by starting them on a small unit or passing meds to residents with simple or uncomplicated regimens.
- **Declutter the med cart.** "Make sure the med cart is clean and organized with no clutter," suggested Griffin, adding, "Clutter and disorganization will add time to the med pass process and increase the potential for errors or problems. Conversely, when your work area is neat, clean, and organized, that lessens the chance for errors." Make sure hallways are clear of hazards that present safety issues or distract nurses from their med pass tasks. He stressed that all this takes time before the med pass starts, but it reaps significant dividends in the end.
- **Have a medication management champion.** It is important to have one or more team members who can serve as an expert source of advice and guidance and can help ensure

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that med pass is done efficiently and in a timely manner. This should be someone team members feel comfortable going to if they have questions, concerns, or suggestions on better ways to do things.

Of course, these efforts take time and effort. Wdowicki said, "There is so much room for improvement in how we assess patients and contribute to the overall care and health of residents through collaboration." She added, "There is so much room for innovation, and we should seek and embrace new ideas and better ways of doing things."

Wdowicki added, "We actually can attract better staff when we do these things. A chaotic environment adds to staff turnover. If people feel good about the facility, how it functions, and how the team collaborates, they are more likely to stay." At the same time, Griffin noted, "When people are rushing and feeling overwhelmed, this contributes to errors or omissions; this, in turn, can lead to poor morale and turnover."

PharMerica is partnering with leading organizations to support DONs and other nurse leaders in long-term and post-acute care with needed resources and education. Access more at PharMerica.com/who-we-are/nurse-advancement.