Knowing Where to Get Drug Information

Problem

Nurses are busy. They have a heavy patient load, have to learn new equipment and technologies, have sicker patients than before, and have fewer people to help them. Despite all these challenges, it is never acceptable for a nurse to administer a drug with which she is not familiar or does not know its potential side effects or interactions with other medications.

Consequence

The impact of medication errors can have severe consequences for the patient and their family. Medication errors could also result in action by the employer, the professional regulatory body, and in criminal and/or civil prosecution. Nurses should never underestimate their responsibilities when administering medication or choosing to omit it.

Solution

Here are some suggested ways to get more information about unfamiliar drugs you are administering to a patient.

- There are a number of good references for the nurse to identify the indications, contraindications, interactions and side effect profiles of drugs.
- Most nursing units have drug handbooks that provide the necessary information; know where they are located in your work unit and use them!
- One of the big advantages of computerized drug information is that the appropriate ranges and alerts are programmed into the system.
- The pharmacy usually has a number of specialty drug references, as will your unit if you are in a specialty area such as intensive care or dialysis unit.
- There is always the opportunity to learn from colleagues on the unit or pharmacists in the pharmacy.
- There are many good online references on drug information and are readily available and free to professionals; find a few and bookmark them from future quick reference.
• As a nurse, you should never feel that you do not have ready access to a reference to help you identify what medications you are giving to your patients; remember that you are the last person to prevent any medication errors.

References

*Avoiding Common Nursing Errors*, Lisa Marcucci, MD, Editor, Lippincott Williams and Wilkins, 2010.


**Note:** A narrated e-Learning module of this Nugget is available at *LearningNurse.com.*