Giving the Right Medications

Problem

Nurses play many roles when practicing bedside nursing and one of the main ones is the “dispenser of medications.” Despite all the dispensing innovations, checks and balances, and awareness/education campaigns, there are patients who are still given the wrong 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 avoid giving patients the wrong medication.

- Check your medication package three times before you give the medication and once more before you toss the packaging into the trash as described below.
- Read the name on the sealed packaging of the medication as you physically remove it from its storage place; be sure you have the right medicine.
- Take the packaged medication to the patient’s chart and compare the drug name and dosage with the written order.
- Do not break the packaging while at the Nurse’s Station or in the Med Room and drop the medication into a pill cup; carry the packaged medication to the patient’s bedside.
- Checking two identifiers including the patient’s armband with the patient’s medication order.
- Read the packaged medication name aloud from the package to the patient and explain what the medicine is and does; do not just wave the package in the air and speak from memory.
• Reading the package medication name provides you with another opportunity to know that the medication you are holding in your hands is the medication you intended to bring to the patient.

• Telling the patient what medication you are about to give, provides a knowledgeable patient the opportunity to confirm that this is the medication she or he is supposed to receive.

• Never argue with a patient who tells you he or she is not supposed to receive the medication; apologize and reassure the patient that you will go back and check again.

• Read the medication package one last time before you dispose of it.

• Reassure yourself one last time that the medication you intended to give is the one you just watched the patient take.

• If after the above checks, you discover that it is the wrong drug or dose, you will know and be able to quickly obtain new orders – possibly before a severe reaction occurs.

References

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

electronic Medicines Compendium (eMC): http://www.medicines.org.uk

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