Looking for the Patch

Problem

Many medications are now administered in transdermal formulations. These include fentanyl, nitroglycerin ointment, clonidine, scopolamine, nicotine and a variety of hormones. The nurse needs to look for transdermal patches during initial assessment and ensure that, when they administer a new dose of the drug, they find the old patch and remove it to prevent overdose.

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 considerations when dealing with transdermal patches.

- Always ask about, and look for, transdermal patches during the initial assessment.

- Patches should be placed on clean, dry, and hairless skin; do not place the patch on abraded or irritated skin because this location will speed up the absorption of the drug.

- Avoid getting the medication on your hands when removing an old patch; if you do, wash your hands immediately and thoroughly.

- Discuss the medication and how it works with your patient; patients often do not believe that medication can be administered this way.

- Absorption of the drug can be increased by rubbing the patch or applying heat or a warming blanket; these should be avoided so that the medication is absorbed in a timely manner.
• Remove the patch if the patient experiences a side effect; this is particularly important for patients who become hypotensive and have multiple nitroglycerin patches in place, or become somnolent due to excessive narcotic administration from fentanyl patches.

• Transdermal medications provide many benefits to patients when used appropriately. The nurse needs to be familiar with their use, and educate their patients on how to use them and what to watch out for.

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.