

Clinical Alert: Interruption of the medication round

Medication is one of the main treatments that we use to try to help our patients get better, but it can cause real harm if used incorrectly.

Several recent incidents have highlighted the fact that nurses who experience interruptions whilst administering medication may be more likely to make a mistake. Distractions and interruptions have had a part to play in incidents in which nurses have administered medication to the wrong patient, administered the incorrect medication, and administered medication at the wrong dose.

In addition to these incident reports, a recent internal audit compared medication rounds in which the nurse was not interrupted, to those in which the nurse had to stop what they were doing to attend to another ward activity.

The audit showed that if the nurse carrying out the medication round interrupted what they were doing to attend to another activity their chance of making an administration error increased.

In fact, interrupting the medication round increased the risk of error by nearly 50%.

Action

All ward areas are asked to review their local practice and assess what they can do to reduce distractions for the nurse carrying out the medication round.

It is the responsibility of both the administering nurse and the rest of the ward staff to ensure that the medication round is kept as interruption-free as possible.

Some things to remember when you are administering medication:

- Do not answer the phone
- Do not take patients for smoking breaks
- Do not engage in conversation with other members of staff
- Do not interrupt the medication round to attend a ward round or meeting
- Do not be distracted by things going on around you- if necessary go into the treatment room and close the door whilst you dispense medication.

Other members of staff- please view the medication administration round as “protected time”.