

Collaboration is key to Medication Safety

A medication safety meeting a month, keeps the doctor nigh



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Pharmacists are medicines experts and our attention to detail is legendary. As pharmacists are extensively, and sometimes exclusively, involved in multiple steps within the medication management cycle, it may seem to an organisation that medication safety is entirely up to pharmacists. However, we know that for optimal and effective healthcare, a team approach is required.

But what about medical staff? Their engagement and involvement within a Medication Safety Committee is essential. There are benefits not only for the individual doctors involved in medication safety discussions, but also for their teams and clinical units. Ultimately medical participation benefits the patients they treat and more broadly, the healthcare organisation.

For many years, I have welcomed medical interns on their first day of orientation with a quote by Dr Colin Feekery, who was involved in the introduction of the National Inpatient Medication Chart, *"on any day the most dangerous thing a doctor can do is lift their pen..."*

It's a startling illustration for medical staff of the importance of thinking about medication safety and how integral it is to the care of every patient they will be prescribing for during their careers. Taking it one step further, membership at a governance committee level provides medical staff with opportunities to impact medication safety beyond their individual practice. These opportunities include: promoting standardisation, governance of documents in a wide area of expertise, gaining insights into patient risk, contributing to incident reviews, awareness of the issues affecting staff in other disciplines, providing context to data in audit results, and appreciating the challenges of change management.

From junior to senior, medical colleagues bring their experiences to the committee across the vast array of specialties. Junior medical officers can provide frank insights into issues impacting workflows, risks, and the challenges faced by their peers. Medical staff can also suggest guidance on how best to engage their time-pressured colleagues. Senior medical staff, due to the size of the medical workforce and the treating medical team model, are often at the 'pointy end' of executive decision-making. Being involved in the organisational Medication Safety Committee ensures an additional voice of advocacy for safety initiatives, along with an understanding of the required resources, and importantly avoids the concept that medicines are only 'Pharmacy Department business'.

For committees making decisions on the medication formulary, which are tied to budgetary implications, it is critical that medical staff are chairing meetings, or at least, are active members. Knowledge of the workings 'behind the scenes' helps medical staff understand and appreciate the rationale behind formulary decisions, evaluating requests for new medicines on the formulary, or seeking approval for new, often off-label indications. Membership and chairing committees ensure appropriate medical peer review of clinical evidence and financial impact.

Collaboration with our colleagues in nursing, midwifery, quality, allied health, pharmacy, and our consumers is essential to support medication safety. For medication safety committees, our medical staff with their pens – or more commonly a mouse or keyboard – in their hand continues to be an essential collaboration.