

Want A Complete Drug Picture? Ask Elderly To “Bag It”

Asking older patients to bring their medications to an appointment or hospital admission may provide a more accurate picture of prescription use than pharmacy records alone, according to Penn State researchers.

As part of a clinical trial on cognitive training in non-demented elderly patients, 294 subjects brought their medications in a brown bag to a group testing session. Because the subjects were also participants in a state-run prescription program, the

researchers were able to check the brown bag medications against the subjects' pharmacy records.

Researchers found that the percentage of individuals with total agreement between self-reporting and pharmacy records ranged from 49% for major drug classes to 81% for specific cardiovascular and central nervous system drugs. Researchers also



Error Watch

Errors Involving PCA Pumps Often Harm Patients

There is a high rate of medication errors associated with patient-controlled analgesia (PCA) pumps, according to data from the MEDMARX error reporting system of the U. S. Pharmacopeia (USP). In fact, USP found that when PCA pumps are involved, the chance of patient harm increased more than threefold. Of more than 5,300 reports of medication errors involving PCA pumps, the most common errors involved improper dose/quantity (39%), unauthorized/wrong drug (18%), and omitting a dose (18%).

In one case, a patient received morphine via a PCA pump that had been ordered per standard protocol. The pa-

tient received four doses of morphine within 1.5 hours and three more doses over the course of the night. The patient became unresponsive and died the next day. A nurse who was removing the PCA noticed a discrepancy between the amount of solution that should have remained in the bag and the amount that was actually there. It was determined that the pump had been incorrectly programmed to deliver 1 mg/ml instead of 0.1 mg/ml.

The USP has issued several recommendations to help prevent this type of error, including installing bar codes on all PCA medications, double-checking the initial setup and mainte-

nance of PCA pumps, and educating patients, family members, and staff about the proper use of a PCA pump, with an emphasis on the fact that no one but the patient himself should administer a PCA dose. The USP's complete list of recommendations can be found at www.usp.org/patientSafety/briefsArticlesReports/qualityReview/q812004-09-01c.html.

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