Robots: The next frontier in seniors’ independence
Medical errors can occur when patients are transferred home or to a long-term care facility.

Patients and their caregivers should ensure that prescribed medication regimens are understood and, in particular, that any regimen involving opioids is monitored appropriately.

**UNDERSTANDING MEDICATION REGIMENS**

Patients’ non-adherence to physician-recommended medical treatment remains a persistent problem. It is estimated that 50 per cent of patients do not take their medications as prescribed. Consequently, clinicians should take steps to actively engage patients and their families as partners in their health. Most importantly, before transfer and discharge clinicians should ensure that patients have the information they need to use their medications safely. According to the Safety at Home: A Pan-Canadian Home Care Study, one in six seniors receive home care services in Canada and it is estimated that the rate of adverse events that have the potential to cause harm is 10-13 per cent.

Given that many home care recipients are taking multiple medications, it is very important that patients and family members understand medication regimens to reduce the risk of preventable medication incidents. Patients and their caregivers should ask and understand the answers to the following five questions about their medications:

1. Have any medications been added, stopped, or changed, and why?
2. What medications do I need to keep taking, and why?
3. How do I take my medication, and for how long?
4. How will I know if my medication is working, and what side effects do I watch for?
5. Do I need any tests and when do I book my next visit?

We encourage patients and their caregivers to download a PDF version of these five questions and share with their patients here. The tool was jointly developed by several organizations (including the Canadian Patient Safety Institute) aiming to improve communication between patients and their caregivers with prescribers. It is available in over 22 languages and can be customized with a logo for implementation in a healthcare facility.

**MONITORING FOR OPIOID-RELATED ADVERSE EVENTS**

Patients are often sent home with patient-controlled analgesia (PCA) pumps and opioids to manage pain.

Although opioids may help to manage pain, patients and their caregivers should be aware their use could result in adverse events or even death. As The Joint Commission cautions:

While opioid use is generally safe for most patients, opioid analgesics may be associated with adverse effects, the most serious effect being respiratory depression, which is generally preceded by sedation.

The PCA Safety Checklist was developed by a panel of experts to reduce the risk of opioid-related adverse events occurring with the use of patient-controlled analgesia (PCA) pumps in-hospital. Patients and their caregivers should be aware of increased risk factors for respiratory compromise as noted in the Checklist, which include:

- Obesity
- Low body weight
- Concomitant medications (both opiates and non-opiates)
- Pre-existing conditions, such as asthma, COPD, and sleep apnea
- Advanced age

Moreover, the PCA Safety Checklist recommends that patients be monitored with pulse oximetry for oxygenation and capnography for adequacy of ventilation. In hospital, these monitors may provide an early indication of patient deterioration and the onset of respiratory compromise. The patient, who is at home or in a long-term care facility, may want to consider such monitoring to ensure their safety.

For more resources dedicated to patient safety, please visit the CPSI and PPAHS websites.

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