



ENHANCING MEDICATION SAFETY: THE ROLE OF PHARMACY TECHNICIANS IN PREVENTING MEDICATION ERRORS

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Abstract:

Medication safety is a critical aspect of healthcare that aims to prevent medication errors and improve patient outcomes. This article provides an overview of key factors that contribute to medication safety, including medication reconciliation, patient education, technology and automation, and collaboration and communication among healthcare professionals. Medication reconciliation plays a vital role in preventing errors during care transitions by ensuring accurate and up-to-date medication information. Patient education empowers individuals to actively participate in their medication management, fostering adherence and reducing risks. Technology and automation, such as computerized physician order entry and barcode medication administration systems, have transformed medication safety by streamlining medication processes and improving accuracy. Collaboration and effective communication among healthcare professionals are crucial, allowing for a comprehensive approach to medication safety. Strategies like interprofessional collaboration, standardized communication tools, and technology-enabled platforms enhance collaboration and communication. By incorporating these factors, healthcare organizations can minimize medication errors and enhance patient safety. Continued investment in training, education, and technological advancements is necessary to ensure the safe and effective use of medications in healthcare settings. Prioritizing medication safety initiatives can optimize patient outcomes and improve overall healthcare quality.

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Introduction:

Medication safety is a critical component of healthcare delivery, with far-reaching implications for patient outcomes. Medication errors can lead to adverse drug events, hospitalizations, and even fatalities, underscoring the need for robust systems and practices to ensure patient safety. Within the healthcare system, pharmacy technicians play a pivotal role in safeguarding medication use processes and preventing medication errors.

Pharmacy technicians are highly skilled professionals who collaborate with pharmacists to facilitate the safe and efficient delivery of medications to patients. Their responsibilities encompass various aspects of medication management, including medication dispensing, inventory management, and prescription processing. As the final checkpoint in the medication distribution process, pharmacy technicians serve as a vital barrier against potential errors before medications reach the patients (ASHP, 2022; NPTA, 2021).

The contributions of pharmacy technicians to medication safety are increasingly recognized and valued. Their involvement in medication reconciliation, double-checking prescriptions, and ensuring accurate labeling and packaging significantly reduces the risk of errors (PTCB, 2020). By employing advanced technologies such as barcode scanning and automated dispensing systems, pharmacy technicians enhance medication safety and minimize the likelihood of medication-related incidents (Wick & Craig, 2019).

Effective collaboration and communication among healthcare professionals are crucial elements in medication safety. Pharmacy technicians work closely with pharmacists, nurses, and physicians to ensure accurate medication orders, resolve discrepancies, and provide necessary information for safe medication administration (Buckley et al., 2020). Clear and concise documentation, along with open lines of communication, promote seamless information flow and facilitate error prevention (Bergamaschi et al., 2021).

Continuous training and education are paramount for pharmacy technicians to maintain their expertise and stay updated with emerging practices and technologies. Formal education programs, certifications, and professional development courses equip pharmacy technicians with the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate complex medication-related challenges (ASHP, 2022; NPTA, 2021).

Despite the growing recognition of their role, there remains a need for further exploration and research regarding the specific contributions of pharmacy technicians to medication safety. Investigating their impact on patient outcomes, evaluating the effectiveness of training programs, and identifying opportunities for improvement can inform evidence-based practices and optimize medication safety initiatives (Buckley et al., 2020; Wick & Craig, 2019).

By understanding the multifaceted responsibilities of pharmacy technicians and the strategies they employ to prevent medication errors, healthcare professionals can appreciate their indispensable contributions to medication safety. This article aims to provide an in-depth exploration of the role of pharmacy technicians in preventing medication errors, highlighting the significance of collaboration, training, and ongoing education in enhancing medication safety.

Section 1: The Role of Pharmacy Technicians in Medication Safety

Pharmacy technicians play a vital role in ensuring medication safety within healthcare settings. Their responsibilities encompass a wide range of tasks that contribute to the safe and effective delivery of medications to patients. By working closely with pharmacists and other healthcare professionals, pharmacy technicians help prevent medication errors and promote patient well-being.

One of the primary responsibilities of pharmacy technicians is medication dispensing. They are involved in accurately preparing and packaging medications, ensuring that the correct medication, dose, and quantity are provided to patients. Pharmacy technicians carefully review medication labels and verify prescriptions to minimize errors during the dispensing process (NPTA, 2021). This attention to detail significantly reduces the risk of medication errors and enhances patient safety.

In addition to dispensing medications, pharmacy technicians actively manage medication inventory. They monitor stock levels, perform regular audits, and ensure appropriate storage conditions. By maintaining an organized and up-to-date inventory, pharmacy technicians contribute to the prevention of medication shortages, expired medications, and medication-related errors (ASHP, 2022).

Pharmacy technicians also play a crucial role in prescription processing. They receive and review prescription orders, ensuring their completeness

and accuracy. This involves verifying patient information, medication dosages, and any specific instructions from prescribers. By diligently reviewing prescription orders, pharmacy technicians help identify potential errors or discrepancies before medications are dispensed to patients (Wick & Craig, 2019).

To further enhance medication safety, pharmacy technicians actively participate in medication reconciliation processes. They collaborate with patients, caregivers, and healthcare providers to ensure accurate medication lists are maintained and updated. Through comprehensive medication reconciliation, pharmacy technicians help identify and resolve discrepancies, such as duplicate medications or potential drug interactions, reducing the risk of adverse drug events (Bergamaschi et al., 2021).

Pharmacy technicians also contribute to medication safety through patient education. They provide information to patients regarding proper medication use, potential side effects, and the importance of adherence to prescribed regimens. By addressing patient concerns and ensuring understanding of medication instructions, pharmacy technicians help promote safe and effective medication use (PTCB, 2020).

Furthermore, pharmacy technicians are instrumental in the implementation and utilization of advanced technologies that enhance medication safety. Barcode scanning systems, for example, are used to verify medication accuracy and match medications with patient profiles, reducing the risk of medication errors (Buckley et al., 2020). Pharmacy technicians also collaborate with pharmacists and healthcare IT specialists in the implementation and maintenance of automated dispensing systems, which streamline medication distribution processes and improve accuracy (ASHP, 2022).

In summary, pharmacy technicians play a multifaceted role in ensuring medication safety. From medication dispensing and inventory management to prescription processing and patient education, their contributions are instrumental in minimizing medication errors and promoting patient safety. By working collaboratively with pharmacists and other healthcare professionals, pharmacy technicians provide an essential layer of protection to ensure the safe and effective use of medications.

Section 2: Training and Education of Pharmacy Technicians for Medication Safety

The training and education of pharmacy technicians are vital components in ensuring their competence and expertise in promoting medication safety. By acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills, pharmacy technicians can effectively carry out their responsibilities and contribute to reducing medication errors and enhancing patient care.

Formal education and training programs are available to prepare individuals for a career as pharmacy technicians. These programs provide a comprehensive curriculum that covers various aspects of pharmacy practice, including medication safety. Through coursework and practical experiences, pharmacy technicians gain a thorough understanding of pharmaceutical calculations, drug classifications, medication dispensing procedures, and legal and ethical considerations (ASHP, 2019).

One of the key elements of pharmacy technician education is the focus on medication safety practices. Students learn about the importance of accurate prescription processing, medication labeling, and verification procedures to prevent medication errors (Cohen et al., 2020). They also receive training on proper medication storage, inventory management, and the handling of hazardous medications to ensure patient safety (ACPE, 2019).

In addition to formal education, pharmacy technicians may pursue certification to demonstrate their competency in medication safety. The Pharmacy Technician Certification Board (PTCB) offers the Certified Pharmacy Technician (CPhT) credential, which validates the knowledge and skills required for safe and effective medication use (PTCB, 2020). Certification programs often include specific modules on medication safety, emphasizing topics such as error prevention strategies, drug interactions, and adverse drug event management (ACPE, 2019).

Continuing education is crucial for pharmacy technicians to stay updated with the latest advancements in medication safety and healthcare practices. Continuing education programs provide opportunities for pharmacy technicians to expand their knowledge and skills in areas such as medication error prevention, patient counseling, and emerging technologies (ASHP, 2022). By participating in continuing education activities, pharmacy technicians can enhance their understanding of medication safety practices and contribute to better patient outcomes.

Pharmacy technicians also benefit from on-the-job training and mentorship programs. Working under the guidance of experienced pharmacists, they gain practical experience in medication safety protocols, including the use of technology systems for medication verification and error reduction (NPTA, 2021). This hands-on training allows pharmacy technicians to develop critical thinking skills and improve their ability to identify and address potential medication errors.

Collaboration with other healthcare professionals is another essential aspect of pharmacy technician education. Pharmacy technicians often work closely with pharmacists, nurses, and physicians, among others, in multidisciplinary teams. By fostering effective communication and teamwork, pharmacy technicians can contribute to a culture of safety and collaboration, ultimately improving medication safety outcomes (Wick & Craig, 2019).

In summary, the training and education of pharmacy technicians are crucial for promoting medication safety. Formal education programs, certification, continuing education, on-the-job training, and collaboration with other healthcare professionals all contribute to the development of competent and knowledgeable pharmacy technicians. By equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge, these educational initiatives empower pharmacy technicians to play an essential role in minimizing medication errors and ensuring patient safety.

Section 3: Technology and Automation in Medication Safety

Technology and automation play a crucial role in enhancing medication safety in various healthcare settings. Advancements in technology have revolutionized medication management processes, reducing the likelihood of errors and improving patient outcomes. This section explores the use of technology and automation in medication safety and highlights their benefits and challenges.

One of the significant contributions of technology to medication safety is the implementation of computerized physician order entry (CPOE) systems. CPOE systems enable healthcare providers to electronically enter and manage medication orders, reducing the risk of errors associated with illegible handwriting and transcription mistakes (Baysari et al., 2018). These systems also incorporate decision support tools, such as drug interaction alerts and dosing recommendations, to help healthcare professionals make informed and safe medication decisions

(Kawamoto et al., 2020). Studies have shown that CPOE systems can significantly reduce medication errors and improve patient safety (Bates et al., 2018).

Another technology that has transformed medication safety is barcode medication administration (BCMA) systems. BCMA systems involve scanning barcodes on medication packages and patient identification bracelets to verify the right medication, dose, route, and patient before administration (Poon et al., 2019). This process helps prevent medication errors, such as administering the wrong medication or dose, by providing real-time error alerts and ensuring medication accuracy (Gelzer et al., 2021). Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of BCMA systems in reducing medication errors and improving patient safety (Poon et al., 2019).

Pharmacy automation systems are also instrumental in medication safety efforts. These systems automate medication dispensing processes, reducing the risk of errors associated with manual counting and labeling of medications (Flynn et al., 2017). Automated dispensing cabinets (ADCs) are commonly used in hospital settings, allowing healthcare professionals to access and dispense medications securely (Forni et al., 2020). ADCs are integrated with electronic medication administration records (eMARs) and CPOE systems, enabling seamless medication management and reducing the potential for errors (Flynn et al., 2017).

The use of robotics in pharmacy settings is an emerging trend in medication safety. Robotic dispensing systems can accurately and efficiently count, package, and label medications, minimizing human errors (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2020). These systems can handle high volumes of medication orders, freeing up pharmacy staff to focus on patient counseling and clinical activities (Flynn et al., 2017). Robotic systems can also assist in inventory management and medication tracking, ensuring the availability and traceability of medications (Flynn et al., 2017).

Despite the numerous benefits, the adoption of technology and automation in medication safety is not without challenges. Implementation costs, infrastructure requirements, and staff training are significant considerations when integrating technology systems into healthcare facilities (Kawamoto et al., 2020). Additionally, technology-related errors, such as system failures or misinterpretation of alerts, can occur and may

compromise medication safety (Baysari et al., 2018). It is crucial to address these challenges by investing in robust training programs, ensuring system compatibility and interoperability, and continuously evaluating and improving technology systems (Kawamoto et al., 2020).

In conclusion, technology and automation have revolutionized medication safety by providing tools and systems that reduce the risk of errors and improve patient outcomes. CPOE systems, BCMA systems, pharmacy automation, and robotics have significantly contributed to medication safety efforts. These technologies enhance medication ordering, administration, and dispensing processes, ensuring accurate and safe medication use. However, challenges such as implementation costs and system-related errors need to be addressed to maximize the benefits of technology in medication safety.

Section 4: Collaboration and Communication in Medication Safety

Collaboration and effective communication among healthcare professionals are vital components of medication safety. By fostering interdisciplinary teamwork and open lines of communication, healthcare providers can work together to identify and prevent medication errors, ultimately improving patient outcomes. This section explores the importance of collaboration and communication in medication safety and highlights strategies to enhance these aspects.

Interprofessional collaboration involves healthcare professionals from different disciplines working together to achieve common goals. In the context of medication safety, collaboration among pharmacists, physicians, nurses, and other healthcare providers is crucial. Each member of the healthcare team brings unique expertise and perspectives that contribute to a comprehensive approach to medication safety (Lapane et al., 2020). For example, pharmacists play a critical role in medication management, ensuring appropriate prescribing, dispensing, and monitoring, while nurses are responsible for administering medications and monitoring patients for adverse effects (Lapane et al., 2020).

One effective strategy to enhance collaboration in medication safety is the implementation of medication safety teams or committees within healthcare organizations. These teams consist of representatives from different disciplines, including pharmacy, nursing, medicine, and administration, who regularly meet to review

medication-related incidents, identify system vulnerabilities, and develop strategies for improvement (Leape et al., 2019). The collaborative nature of these teams allows for a comprehensive analysis of medication safety issues and the implementation of evidence-based solutions.

Effective communication is another critical component of medication safety. Clear and concise communication among healthcare professionals helps prevent misunderstandings and reduces the likelihood of medication errors. It is essential to establish a culture of open communication where healthcare providers feel comfortable asking questions, seeking clarification, and reporting potential medication-related concerns (Pape et al., 2018). This includes clear communication of medication orders, medication information, and patient-specific factors to ensure accurate and safe medication use.

Standardized communication tools, such as the SBAR (Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation) framework, can enhance communication in medication safety. The SBAR framework provides a structured way for healthcare professionals to convey critical information, particularly during handoffs and transitions of care (Haig et al., 2018). By following this framework, healthcare providers can effectively communicate essential medication-related information, including allergies, medication history, and any changes in the patient's condition, minimizing the risk of errors during care transitions.

In addition to interprofessional collaboration and effective communication practices, the use of technology can further support collaboration and communication in medication safety. Electronic health records (EHRs) and computerized provider order entry (CPOE) systems facilitate seamless sharing of patient information among healthcare providers, ensuring accurate and up-to-date medication-related information is accessible (Poon et al., 2019). Moreover, secure messaging platforms and telehealth technologies enable real-time communication and consultation among healthcare professionals, even when they are not physically present in the same location (McGonigle & Mastrian, 2017). These technologies enhance communication and collaboration, particularly in situations where timely decision-making is crucial for medication safety.

To foster collaboration and communication in medication safety, healthcare organizations should

prioritize the development of interdisciplinary training programs and initiatives. These programs can promote understanding, respect, and effective communication among healthcare professionals from different disciplines (Lapane et al., 2020). By engaging in shared learning experiences, healthcare professionals gain insight into each other's roles, responsibilities, and perspectives, facilitating collaboration and enhancing medication safety efforts.

In conclusion, collaboration and communication are essential in promoting medication safety. Interprofessional collaboration allows healthcare professionals to leverage their unique expertise and perspectives to identify and prevent medication errors. Effective communication, both verbal and written, ensures accurate and timely sharing of medication-related information. By adopting strategies such as medication safety teams, standardized communication tools, and technology-enabled communication platforms, healthcare organizations can enhance collaboration and communication, ultimately improving medication safety and patient outcomes.

Conclusion:

Medication safety is a critical aspect of healthcare delivery, aiming to prevent medication errors and ensure patient well-being. In this article, we have explored various factors that contribute to medication safety, including medication reconciliation, patient education, technology and automation, and collaboration and communication among healthcare professionals.

Medication reconciliation plays a crucial role in preventing medication errors during care transitions. By ensuring accurate and up-to-date medication information, healthcare providers can identify and resolve discrepancies, reducing the risk of adverse events. Patient education is equally important, empowering individuals to actively participate in their medication management, understand potential risks and benefits, and adhere to prescribed regimens.

Technology and automation have transformed medication safety by enhancing medication management processes. Computerized physician order entry (CPOE) systems, barcode medication administration (BCMA) systems, pharmacy automation, and robotics have significantly reduced the likelihood of errors and improved patient outcomes. These technologies streamline medication ordering, administration, and dispensing, ensuring accurate and safe medication

use. However, challenges such as implementation costs and system-related errors need to be addressed to maximize the benefits of technology in medication safety.

Collaboration and effective communication among healthcare professionals are vital to medication safety. Interprofessional collaboration allows for a comprehensive approach to medication safety, leveraging the unique expertise of pharmacists, physicians, nurses, and other healthcare providers. Clear and concise communication minimizes misunderstandings and reduces the likelihood of medication errors. Standardized communication tools and the use of technology further support collaboration and communication in medication safety.

In conclusion, medication safety is a multifaceted endeavor that requires a comprehensive approach. By incorporating medication reconciliation, patient education, technology and automation, and collaboration and communication, healthcare organizations can minimize medication errors and improve patient outcomes. It is crucial for healthcare professionals, administrators, and policymakers to continue prioritizing medication safety initiatives, investing in training and education, and embracing technological advancements to ensure the safe and effective use of medications in healthcare settings. By doing so, we can enhance patient safety and optimize the benefits of medication therapy.

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