Sharija Che Shaari
Pensyarah Kanan Undang-undang
Fakulti Perniagaan, Ekonomi dan Perakaunan
Universiti Malaysia Sabah
sharija@ums.edu.my/scslaw2012@gmail.com

SCS-Medico Legal Bil 3 (2024)

Steps to prevent the occurrence of medical errors

Medical errors pose significant risks to patient safety, leading to adverse health outcomes and increased healthcare costs. Understanding the root causes of these errors is crucial for developing effective prevention strategies. Below are key steps healthcare professionals can take to minimize the occurrence of medical errors:

Steps to Prevent Medical Errors

1. Enhance Communication
- Standardize Communication Protocols: Implement tools like checklists and standardized communication tools like SBAR (Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation) to ensure clear and concise information exchange among healthcare providers.
- Handoff Protocols: Standardize handoff communication during patient transfers to ensure continuity of care.
- Encourage Open Dialogue: Foster an environment where team members feel comfortable discussing concerns or uncertainties regarding patient care without fear of retribution.

2. Improve Documentation Practices
- Utilize Electronic Health Records (EHR): Ensure accurate and up-to-date patient information is easily accessible through EHR systems, reducing the likelihood of miscommunication and errors due to incomplete records.
- Regular Audits: Conduct regular audits, both external and internal, of documentation practices to identify areas for improvement and ensure

compliance with established protocols. Conducting periodic reviews of processes are vital to ensure compliance with safety standards.

3. Implement Safety Protocols
- Evidence-Based Guidelines: Ensure that clinical practices follow evidence-based protocols to reduce variability in care.
- Checklists and Protocols: Use checklists for procedures, especially in surgical settings, to ensure all necessary steps are followed and nothing is overlooked.
- Double-Check Systems: Establish double-check systems for high-risk medications and procedures, requiring verification by another qualified professional before administration.

4. Enhance Staff Training and Education
- Ongoing Education: Conduct ongoing education for healthcare providers on best practices, new protocols, and patient safety measures. It will be beneficial to provide continuous education on best practices, new technologies, and updates in medication management to keep staff informed about potential risks and prevention strategies.
- Simulation Training: Utilize simulation-based training to prepare staff in handling emergency situations and complex procedures, reinforcing skills and teamwork without risking patient's safety.

5. Ensure Adequate Staffing
- Adequate Staffing: Ensure adequate staffing levels to prevent burnout and fatigue among healthcare workers, which can contribute to errors. Adequate staffing will prevent excessive working hours and fatigue, which can impair decision-making.
- Skill Mix: Ensure an appropriate mix of skills within teams to handle varying patient needs effectively.
- Workload Management: Monitor workloads and adjust assignments as necessary to maintain a manageable pace for healthcare professionals.

6. Prioritize Patient Engagement
- Patient Education: Medical professionals must educate patients about their conditions, treatment options, and potential side effects of medications. Patients must be empowered to ask questions and clarify doubts about their care plan.
- Informed Consent: Ensure that patients fully understand the procedures they are undergoing by providing clear explanations and obtaining informed consent. Failure to obtain informed consent can lead to legal liability for medical professionals.

7. Utilize Technology and Automation Effectively
- Barcoding Systems: Use barcode scanning for medication administration to verify the correct patient, drug, dose, route, and time (the Five Rights)to ensure the right patient receives the right medication at the right dose].
- Decision Support Systems: Use clinical decision support tools integrated into Electronic Health Records (EHRs) to alert providers about potential drug

interactions or allergies based on patient history. The implementation of EHR systems will minimize manual errors, such as transcription mistakes or drug interactions.

8. Conduct Root Cause Analyses (RCA)
- Learn from Errors: Perform RCA for every reported error or near miss to identify systemic issues and implement corrective actions.
- Involve All Stakeholders: Engage all team members in discussing and resolving issues identified in the RCA.

9. Adopt a Systems-Based Approach and Regular Monitoring
- Focus on Systems, Not Individuals: Shift from blaming individuals to addressing systemic issues that contribute to errors.
- Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI): Establish CQI programs to routinely assess and improve healthcare processes.
- Feedback Mechanisms: Use patient feedback and staff suggestions to identify potential improvements.

10. Foster a Culture of Safety
- Non-Punitive Reporting Systems: It is pertinent to create an environment where medical professionals feel comfortable reporting errors or near misses without fear of punishment. This environment allows learning opportunities for medical professionals rather than blame.
- Leadership Commitment: Ensure that leadership prioritizes patient safety by allocating resources for safety initiatives and promoting a culture that values transparency and accountability.
- Promote Teamwork: Foster collaboration across multidisciplinary teams to enhance patient care.

Conclusion

Preventing medical errors requires a multifaceted approach that involves enhancing communication, improving documentation practices, implementing safety protocols, providing ongoing education, optimizing staffing levels, engaging patients in their care, utilizing technology effectively, and fostering a culture of safety. By taking these steps, medical professionals can significantly reduce the incidence of medical errors and improve overall patient safety. By implementing these strategies, healthcare organizations can significantly reduce the likelihood of medical errors, enhance patient safety, and build trust with patients and their families.