

# HEADS UP...

**TOPIC: Safely stored medications**

**SETTING: Nursing Care Centers**



## Why is this important?

Findings related to medication storage (MM.03.01.01 EP 7) continue to appear in the most frequently scored standards and EPs in the nursing care center settings. While the number of moderate and high-risk findings across accredited organizations is not large, the potential for harm associated with inappropriate medication storage and labeling can be high. Organizations are encouraged to review their processes for medication storage and labeling practices.

## Scope of the Problem:

Time period: **July 1, 2019 –September 30, 2020**

Number of full surveys performed: **214**

Number of surveys with moderate to high-risk findings related to safely stored medications (**MM.03.01.01 EP 7**): **18 (8%)**

**MM.03.01.01 EP 7:** The organization safely stores medications. All stored medications and the components used in their preparation are labeled with the contents, expiration date, and any applicable warnings.

Observations identified within a specific topic area may reveal systemic areas of improvement across the organization which might be reflected in additional standards/EPs: MM.03.01.01 EP 2, 3, 4, 6 and 8, MM.01.01.03 EP 7, MM.05.01.09, MM.05.01.15 EP 4, LD.04.03.09 EP 4, 5 and 6

## Sample survey observations (and contributing factors)

- Medications observed stored without expiration dates. The medication opening date was the only one noted.
- IV fluids/dialysis fluid expiration dates not revised when placed into fluid warmer.
- An IV bag had been removed from its protective outer wrap but there was no expiration date written on the bag.
- Succinylcholine was being stored at room temperature without a new expiration date based on discontinuing refrigerated storage.
- An opened Sterile 2% Lidocaine topical ointment had no revised expiration date. The manufacturer's IFU states the ointment expires 30 days after opening.
- A multi dose vial did not have an expiration date on the labeling.
- Insulin vials/pens that were opened and available for administration and had not been labeled with the expiration date.

### Potential contributing factors:

- Staff unaware of policy on dating insulin and there was no system in place for monitoring insulin in medication carts.
- Staff lacked an understanding of the rationale and significance of not dating Insulin.
- Staff lacked an understanding of the policy and procedures that were required for the storage of all medications.
- Leadership and management failed to educate staff and identify a process and assign responsibility for ongoing surveillance.
- Lack of auditing tool to ensure the labeling of expiration dates in accordance with manufacturer's instructions.
- Lack of monitoring and spot-checks to ensure all applicable medications were dated and current.
- Lack of accountability from nursing leadership and deficient oversight from supervisory clinical team members.
- Medication administration is frequently delegated to unlicensed assistive personnel with limited training or experience in medication management.
- Medication administration is frequently considered a simple task of "passing medications" without a full understanding of the complexities of the interactions and decision points required to administer medications safely.

## How to identify potential problems in your organization

### Review your policies and procedures

- Does the organization have clearly defined policies and procedures to ensure the safety, storage and management of medications?
  - Does this policy and procedure include information regarding the proper labeling of dates, applicable warnings, etc. for medications?
  - Is there a clearly defined auditing system to monitor that medications are being labeled properly? How frequently are medications being audited? How frequently are tracking logs being audited? How are these audits documented?
- Who is responsible for monitoring logs of medication checks?
- Is education/training regarding the safe storage of medications provided to the appropriate staff?
- What are the responsibilities of the out-sourced pharmacy?
- Are procedures in place to support communication and meaningful hands-off between nurses and unlicensed assistive personnel engaged in medication administration?
- Have you established clear expectations for your contracted pharmacy services regarding medication labeling and communication of manufacturers recommendations for storage?
- How does your organization ensure your contracted pharmacy services comply with your expectations regarding medication labeling?

### Interview staff

- Staff know and can describe proper and safe medication storage procedures (including labeling and following manufacture's guidelines).
- Staff can discuss the process for ensuring the safety and proper managing of medications (e.g., labeling with appropriate dates, etc.).
- Staff can articulate how and when to modify a medication label, as needed?
- What does staff do with medications that are not labeled per policy?
- All personnel engaged in medication administration can describe methods used to support teamwork and communication related to the safe administration of medication.

### Assess your environment

- How does your organization ensure that all medication is correctly labeled, relabeled and/or stored?
- How does the organization ensure that medications are stored per manufacturer's recommendations? Per organization's policies?
- Are the manufacturer's instructions readily available and accessible for medications?
- Do you have a safety culture that supports personnel reporting issues with medication management?

### Evaluate implementation

- Conduct audits and spot checks of medication storage areas to ensure medications are stored, managed and labeled appropriately.
- What does your organization do with expired, damaged or contaminated medications?
- Review the policy and procedure for storing medications annually to ensure that information is up-to-date and the appropriate assessments are being conducted.
- Evaluate contracted pharmacy services compliance with your expectations regarding medication labeling and communication of manufacturers recommendations for storage?
- Access your culture of safety

### What are some resources that can assist in mitigating risks in these areas?

- [TeamSTEPPS® 2.0 for Long-Term Care](#). Content last reviewed May 2019. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Rockville, MD.
- [Nursing Home Survey on Patient Safety Culture](#). Content last reviewed October 2020. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Rockville, MD.
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). [Prescription Drug Labeling Resources](#). 30 November 2020. Accessed December 8, 2020:
- The Lewin Group (Prepared for Centers of Medicare and Medicaid). [CMS Review of Current Standards of Practice for Long-Term Care Pharmacy Services: Long-Term Care Pharmacy Primer](#). December 30, 2004. Accessed December 8, 2020.