

HEADS UP...

TOPIC: Medication orders

SETTING: Ambulatory Health Care (AHC) Program

Why is this important?

Medication management is an important part of treatment for many diseases and conditions. However, if incorrectly administered, medications have the potential to cause great harm. Medication orders should be reviewed for accuracy and potential contraindications. The review should consider patient allergies and sensitivities, existing or potential drug interactions, appropriateness of frequency, dose and route of administration, impact on laboratory values and therapeutic duplication. When more than one medication is prescribed for the same indication, it is important to verify whether the ordering of multiple agents for the same indications was intended. The goal is to ensure that medication orders are clear and accurate for all members of the patient care team.

Scope of the Problem:

Time period: **January 1, 2021 through May 13, 2022**

Number of full surveys performed: **212**

Number of surveys with moderate to high risk findings for MM.05.01.01 EP 4: **13 (6%)**

Relevant standard/EP: MM.05.01.01 The organization reviews the appropriateness of all medication orders for medications to be dispensed in the organization. **EP 4** All medication orders are reviewed for the following: Patient allergies or potential sensitivities; Existing or potential interactions between the medication ordered and food and medications the patient is currently taking; The appropriateness of the medication, dose, frequency, and route of administration; Current or potential impact as indicated by laboratory values; Therapeutic duplication; and Other contraindications

Sample survey observations [from surveyor notes] and contributing factors

Sample observations:

- Observed in Record Review. In 8 out of 12 medical records reviewed, multiple medications were ordered simultaneously for post-operative analgesia and/or nausea and vomiting by the anesthesiologist without differentiating instructions for the RN administering the medications; without an indication of the order of prioritization or a numerical pain score to differentiate between multiple medications. The organization was unable to show evidence of a process which addressed therapeutic duplication.
- Medication orders not reviewed for sensitivities, interactions with food or other meds, appropriateness, no co-ordination with lab values or results.
- Observed in Individual Tracer. In 3 of 3 patient records reviewed, the Post -op Order form contained therapeutic duplication for pain medications, antiemetics or both. The way some physicians were completing (or not completing) the form did not give clear physician orders for which medication to use under what circumstance.

Potential contributing factors:

- Lack of training or education regarding protocols for safe medication practices.
- Policy or procedures do not address therapeutic duplication in medication orders
- Staff or ordering practitioner not following process or protocols to avoid therapeutic duplication.

How to identify potential problems in your organization

Review your policies and procedures

- Does the organization have a written medication management policy?
- Does the policy include review of medication orders for accuracy, appropriateness, potential drug interactions and therapeutic duplication?
- Does the organization have policies or protocols in place to prevent therapeutic duplication?

Interview staff (e.g., clinicians and support staff)

- Have staff received training and education regarding the review of medication orders?
 - Can staff describe the process for reviewing the appropriateness of medication orders?
 - Can staff describe therapeutic duplication?
- Is there a process to correct and/or clarify inaccurate, incomplete, illegible, or unclear medication orders?
- Are staff aware of their responsibilities related to reviewing medication orders?

Assess your environment

- Do medication order forms and or electronic record fields include medication order review?
- Do staff feel empowered to question medication orders and ask for clarification?

Evaluate implementation

- Does the organization monitor and collect data on medication errors related to medication orders?
- Are periodic audits conducted to assess and ensure accuracy of medication orders?

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

- Joint Commission website, Interpreting Joint Commission standards (Ambulatory), Frequently asked Questions (FAQ). Therapeutic duplication v. multi-modal therapy: Is therapeutic duplication prohibited by the Joint Commission? [FAQ on therapeutic duplication](#).
- Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) website: <https://www.ismp.org/>