

Swallowing the hard pill: Improving multidisciplinary communication and medication management for patients with dysphagia

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BACKGROUND

Medication modification, such as crushing of tablets, is common in patients with dysphagia. However, there is varied understanding of medication modification and administration amongst nursing and speech pathology, subsequently risking unintended alteration of medication properties, exposure to hazardous particles, and increased work demands. Deficiencies in staff knowledge, role delineation and multidisciplinary communication further complicate medication management in a multidisciplinary team.

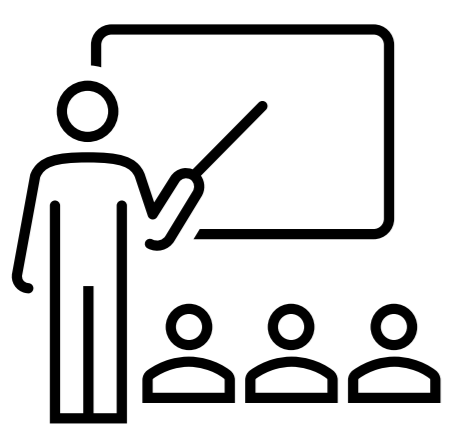
OBJECTIVE(S)

To evaluate: 1) current medication practices, and 2) the impact of a collaborative training-program, on medication management between nursing, speech pathology, and pharmacy.

METHOD

A sample of nursing, speech pathology, and pharmacy staff from a neurology ward within a 500-bed tertiary hospital, were provided a training-program including: education on medication modification, definition of roles in medication management, and clearer written communication tools such as an updated electronic medical record (eMR) documentation template (see figures 1-3).

1 In-services



2 Change

- eMR templates
- Verbal communication
- Multidisciplinary Team Flowcharts

3 Staff surveys & eMR audit (2 months pre- and 1 month post-implementation)



Progress Note Nursing/Midwifery

Medications: Mark with X Administered **Whole**[x] Administered **Crushed**[] Administered with **Fluid**[x] Administered with **food**[]

Figure 1. Nursing documentation template updated to include information on medication administration

Progress Note:
Progress Note Allied Health
Progress Note - Allied Health

SPEECH PATHOLOGY SWALLOW AND COMMUNICATION REVIEW

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Soft dental diet
2. Thin fluids
3. Safe swallow strategies: Alert and upright for all intake, single sips at slow rate
4. Cease intake and contact Speech Pathology if coughing, wet voice, SOB with oral intake
5. Monitor chest/temperature/respiratory status for signs of aspiration
6. Meal set-up assist
7. Regular oral care please
8. Try tablets whole with thin fluids first. If unable to swallow whole tablets - crush with puree / thickened fluids (refer to ?Crush MIMS tab online or ask Pharmacist)

Figure 2. Speech pathology documentation template updated to include recommendations on medication administration

 hydroxychloroquine 200 mg, Oral, Tablet, BD, reg med P: May be crushed (pregnant nursing staff should not crush tablet) hydroxychloroquine	 sulfaSALazine 1,000 mg, NG, Tablet, BD after food, reg med P: May be an irritant, please wear gloves when crushing tablets. sulfaSALazine
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Figure 3. Examples of pharmacist annotation of medication orders providing further information on medication modification

EVALUATION

Pre-implementation:

- Poor communication between disciplines
- Contributing factors included insufficient verbal handover and documentation, and reduced knowledge of roles and medication properties.

Post-implementation:

- Increased communication,
- Greater confidence, and
- Improved staff knowledge.

*"I have had **more conversations** with pharmacy in the last month than in the last year!"*

*"Nursing **documentation** regarding medication administration has been **incredibly helpful**"*

Whilst the pharmacist's role in medication management was largely unchanged, increased transparency through written and verbal communication resulted in a decrease in unnecessary medication modification, improved clarity during interdisciplinary handover, and greater involvement of the multidisciplinary team in medication management.

DISCUSSION

Collaboration and clear communication through education and use of a simple electronic tool enhanced multidisciplinary medication management in patients with dysphagia. This program also illustrated that pharmacists are well-positioned to educate and encourage best medication practice. Future research in a larger multidisciplinary team including medical, patients and carers may provide additional value and understanding of this program.