

Pharmacy tip: Medication prescribed to be taken 'when required'

This pharmacy tip applies to care homes and domiciliary care.

What issues need to be considered?

- What information is available for staff to know how to administer the medication?
- Do staff know what the medication has been prescribed for?
- Do staff know when to give the medication or ask the person if they need it? Do they know what symptoms to look out for?
- Is the maximum amount to be given in a day or the time to leave between doses recorded?
- Is the person offered the medication at times other than the usual medication rounds?
- What records need to be made on the MAR chart?

Discussions

Medication with a 'when required' dose (PRN) is usually prescribed to treat short term or intermittent medical conditions i.e. it is not to be taken regularly.

To ensure the medication is given as intended a specific plan for administration must be recorded in the care plan and ideally kept with the MAR charts. Information on why the medication has been prescribed and how to give it should be sought from the prescriber, the supplying pharmacist or other healthcare professionals involved in the treatment of the person.

Detailed information can also be found in reference sources such as the Patient Information Leaflet, British National Formulary or on the NHS Choices Website (www.nhs.uk).

Consideration should be given to the person's capacity to refuse the medication. When providing staff with information the needs of the person must be identified e.g. if signs of pain are expressed in a non-verbal way.

A record does not have to be made at each medicine round to show the person has been offered the medication. However the care plan should demonstrate that staff know what the medication is for and have made an assessment on whether the person requires the medication.

PRN medication should not be offered or given only at the times listed on the MAR chart or at specific medication rounds. As it is for occasional use the person should be offered the medication at the times they are experiencing the symptoms either by telling a member of staff or by staff identifying the person's need as outlined in the care plan. The exact time the medication was given and the amount given should be recorded on the MAR chart.

If PRN medication is given regularly then a referral to the prescriber should be considered for a review of the person's medication, as their medical condition may have changed and the treatment required may need altering. Similarly if the medication is not having the expected effects the prescriber should be contacted. In both cases the response to the medication should be clearly recorded.

PRN medication that is still in use and in date should be carried over from one month to the next and not disposed of. A record of the quantity carried over should be recorded on the new MAR chart so there is an accurate record of the quantity in stock and to help when performing audits.

PRN medication is best supplied in an original box rather than a monitored dosage system (MDS). This allows for a check on the expiry date and reduces waste.

In domiciliary care the administration of PRN medication may not be at the time of the care worker's visit. In such circumstances the care plan must detail how the person's needs are to be met. For example the medication may be left out for the person to take at a time suitable for them. Robust records must be kept of what medication was left, who by, where and in what container.

What kind of things will inspectors be looking for?

- Does the medication policy and procedure cover the administration of PRN medication?
- Do care plans provide detailed information on medication prescribed as 'when required'?
- Do staff understand what the medication is for?
- Is PRN medication regularly given? If so has a review of the medication taken place?
- Is PRN medication offered at times to meet the needs of the person?
- Are accurate records of administration made?
- Are PRN medicines held in suitable quantities and in date?