Trust rolls out red tabards to make drug rounds safer

Essex Rivers Healthcare NHS Trust is committed to medication safety and has initiated a red tabard scheme to further improve drug administration.

It has been recognised nationally and internationally that interruptions and distractions during drug rounds interfere with the ability to concentrate and may potentially lead to errors.

Essex Rivers Healthcare, which runs Colchester General Hospital and Essex County Hospital, is hoping that by wearing red tabards during drug rounds nurses will reduce the number of interruptions and distractions.

The tabard scheme means that registered nurses wear red tabards over their uniforms during every drug round as a reminder to other healthcare staff that they are administering medicines and should not be interrupted unnecessarily. Other staff are available to focus on the care of patients and answer queries.

Patients and visitors are being informed of this system via a hospital leaflet given out on admission and by bright signage on the wards. The response from patients and visitors so far has been very positive.

An initial mini-trial was led by Sarah Kench, Clinical Skills Nurse, on Easthorpe Ward, a care of the elderly ward at Colchester General Hospital, with the assistance of Louise Notley, Practice Development Nurse.

The findings were presented at the Trust’s Sharing Good Practice forum in May which resulted in a further trial over a three-month period. Its aims were to prevent delays in treatment times, reduce interruptions during drug rounds, increase confidence and cut the number of medication incidents and length of time taken to complete routine drug rounds.

The trial indicated that the average number of interruptions during drug rounds was reduced by 71% which significantly reduced the length of time taken by staff to complete a drug round, enabling them to move onto other aspects of care.

Staff described feeling more confident and safer during their medication rounds. Initial findings also indicated a reduction in the number of drug errors. This scheme has also been implemented in other hospitals and can be seen on the BBC’s Holby City.

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There are obvious benefits to reducing the time taken to undertake medication rounds. In particular, patients will receive their medication in a more timely fashion and trained nurses will have more time on an early shift to undertake other nursing activities such as helping with breakfast/feeding patients, assisting with hygiene and ensuring patients are ready for discharge.

Following this successful trial, the red tabards have been implemented on all care of the elderly and medical wards.

The scheme is currently being rolled-out across the few remaining wards where drug rounds are a fundamental component of patients’ everyday nursing care.

6 December 2007