Nurses wearing tabards improves safety in administering medicines

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### Context
Colchester Hospital University NHS Foundation Trust (CHUFT) is a busy 600-bed acute district general hospital with 1200 nurses on 30 wards, serving a local population of 370,000.

### Problem
- Significant drug administration errors were occurring.
- Root cause analyses implicated distraction to nurses during the "drug (administration) round".
- Interruptions during the drug round also led to prolonged delays in administration of medicines, resulting in sub-optimal care of the patients.
- All these led to low morale among the nursing staff, as their productivity was being undermined.

### Problem Analysis
- A 2-week audit of interruptions and time taken on the 0800, 1200 and 1800 medication rounds was undertaken on a large Care of the Elderly (COTE) ward; where most patients required significant nursing support.
- A 1-month trial followed in which nurses wore red tabards during drug administration, noting:
  - the number of interruptions
  - the total number of medicines administered per patient
  - the time taken to complete the round.
- The results showed a 28% reduction (111 from 153) in the number of interruptions, giving an impetus for an extended trial.

### Strategy for Change
- A 3-month extended trial on two large COTE wards was approved.
  - The aims were to:
    1. Prevent delay in patient’s drug treatment
    2. Decrease the number of interruptions during a medication round
    3. Increase confidence and promote best practice among nursing staff
    4. Decrease the number of medication incidents
    5. Decrease the length of time taken to complete a routine medication round.
  - The results from the 1-month trial were used to achieve buy-in.
  - Senior nurses coordinated training and logistics for purchasing and laundering the tabards.
  - Active paper and electronic publicity were employed.
  - The findings were shared with the Trust.

### Measurement of Improvement
The aims of the three-month trial were satisfied:
1. The time taken for 08.00 medication round was reduced from 108 minutes to 70 minutes.
   - This nursing time/efficiency saving was £14,180 per ward per year.
2. The number of interruptions reduced by 71%.
3. Overall comments from staff were very positive:
   - Medication rounds completed quickly
   - Other aspects of care delivered promptly
   - Greater confidence and feeling safer during rounds.
4. There were only 3 medication incidents reported during the trial period.
5. There was an average a 9-min reduction in the time to complete the 18.00 medication round.

### Effects of Changes
1. Reduction in time for drug round
   - Benefits include:
     - Patients receiving their medication in a timely manner
     - Trained nurses having more time to undertake other nursing activities
2. Reduction in interruptions
   - Potentially reducing the number of medication errors
3. Staff morale
   - Overall, staff were very positive and appreciated the protected time to undertake this vital nursing role.
4. Trust-wide implementation
   - Trust executive approved a phased roll out
   - Using tabards for drug rounds is now CHUFT policy.

### Lessons Learnt
- Staff should be given protected time for the high-risk activity of administering medicines.
  - A simple tabard says "do not disturb", and empowers the staff member to say “no” to interruptions for less urgent tasks.

### Message for Others
- Safety solutions can be simple, but yet effective.
- The red tabards are now being piloted for staff undertaking final checking activities in Pharmacy, and the principle can be applied in almost any sector where staff concentration is important.