

Ms Helen COLINET

Helen Colinet¹ P Moran² S Mackay³ S MittenLewis⁴ J Donoghue⁵ ¹CNC Immunology & ²NAPSM (Medicine) & ³A/Director of Pharmacy, St George Hospital, ⁴Research assistant South East Health, ⁵Prof. Acute Care SGH and Uni. of Technology.

Evaluation Of Patient Knowledge Regarding Medications And Dosage Following Discharge From Hospital.

Abstract

Aim: To determine if patients who are discharged from St George Hospital with a computer generated individualised medication summary (MedCard) will have greater knowledge of their prescribed medications (name of medication, dose and times, why they are taken and any possible side effects) than patients who are discharged without written instructions.

Methods: The study was a blinded, prospective, comparative design. The first 300 patients discharged from the Division of Medicine who fit the selection criteria were enrolled. Patients 65 years or older with five or more discharge medications, who had not previously received a MedCard and who were being discharged to the patient's regular place of abode, were randomly assigned to be provided with either:-

1. discharge medications PLUS a MedCard, or
2. discharge medications only and no MedCard.

Medical and nursing staff, unaware of the selection, gave inpatients routine education specific to their illness and the required medications. Pharmacy staff received the selection in a sealed envelope with the discharge script. Patients in both groups were followed-up, blinded to selection, by telephone to evaluate their level of understanding regarding their discharge medications.

Results: Of 300 participants 78 (26%) were excluded. The study population of 222 comprised 129 (58%) women and 93 (42%) men, age range 65-96 years (mean 77.5, SD 7.07), randomised to MedCard (n=110) or no MedCard (n=112). Age, gender and language were similar in both groups. There were 19 language groups: 163 (73.4%) English, 59 (26.6%) NESB of whom 23 (40%) required an interpreter. Overall only 3 (1.3%) patients knew everything about their medications and 12 (5.4%) knew nothing. Breakdown of significant data by question is as follows:

Patient Understood	Name of Med		Dose & Time		Why taking		Side effects	
	All	Nil	All	Nil	All	Nil	All	Nil
YES Card	96 (87%)	6 (6%)	96 (87%)	5 (4.5%)	63 (57%)	7 (6%)	1 (1%)	61 (56%)
NO Card	97 (87%)	8 (7%)	94 (84%)	8 (7%)	50 (45%)	9 (8%)	2 (2%)	69 (62%)

Having a MedCard made no difference to patients' knowledge except that a greater proportion with cards understood the reason they were prescribed ($p=0.04$). There was a negative correlation with age and patients' understanding why they were taking medications [Pearson $r -0.17$ ($p=0.009$)]. Patients' with poor English language skills who used a professional interpreter had significantly less knowledge: name ($p=0.001$), dose & time ($p=0.004$), why ($p=0.006$), side effects ($p=0.03$).

Conclusions: While the St George Hospital MedCard is valued by both medical and nursing staff, this study could not demonstrate that it assisted patients to have greater knowledge of their medications except a slightly better understanding of why each medication was prescribed.

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