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Medication errors in medical wards of a base hospital in Sri Lanka

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Objectives

Medication errors affects patient safety. Study on medication errors may help to prevent them. We aimed to assess the frequency and types of prescribing errors and some selected drug administration errors among in-patients of a medical ward.

Methods

The study was conducted in two medical wards of a base hospital in Sri Lanka. Prescribing errors were identified among drugs prescribed in the latest prescription of randomly selected inpatients. Medical notes, medication histories and clinic notes were used as support information. The consistency of drug administration in relation to prescribing instructions were also assessed by matching prescriptions with drug charts.

Results

Prescriptions of 400 patients which included 2182 drugs were analysed. There were 59.3% males and 40.8% females with a mean (standard deviation) age of 52.5 (20.0) years. The mean (standard deviation) number of drugs per prescription was 5.5 (3.0). There were 108 prescriptions with at least one prescribing error. Among the 400 prescriptions, there were 33.8% prescribing errors. The most frequent types of prescribing errors were 'wrong frequency' errors (11.5%), 'drug duplications' (9.8%), 'unacceptable drug combinations' (5.5%) and 'drug omissions' (4.3%). There were 9 drug charts that were inconsistent with the prescribing instructions. Among the prescriptions analysed, 2.5% inconsistencies in drug charts were observed. Most frequent were the mismatch of drug frequencies between prescriptions and drug charts.

Conclusions

Prescribing errors and some selected drug administration errors were identified in prescriptions in the hospital. Regular reviewing of prescriptions can help to identify these potential threats to patient safety.