

'S' is for?

An audit of the self-administration code ('S') on the National Inpatient Medication Chart

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Background

The definition and appropriate use of the administration code 'S' on the National Inpatient Medication Chart (NIMC) is poorly understood despite widespread use.

The hospital's policy for the administration of medications did not include details regarding appropriate use of the administration code 'S', and there was no reference to the NIMC guidelines for clarification

It was unknown if patients were observed by nursing staff when self-administering, or if dose forms such as inhalers left at the bedside were being dosed at patients discretion. Patients who were "self-administering" inhalers were also potentially missing inhaler technique education.

Aim

- To assess the use of 'S' (self-administration code), on the medical and surgical wards against the NIMC guidelines
- Where 'S' was used, to determine if nurses had assessed the patient's ability to self administer the medication and/or provide appropriate education



Methods

Medication orders from medical and surgical wards containing the administration code 'S' were reviewed over seven days (excluding those for insulin).

The patients medical record was reviewed for medication self-administration approval by the treating team.

The nurse caring for the patient was asked if the self-administered dose was witnessed by them, and if the patient was provided with education and/or counselling around the self-administered medication.

15

patients identified as having an 'S' code somewhere on the medication chart

37

different medications with an 'S' code (Figure 1)

0

patients had documented approval for self-administration

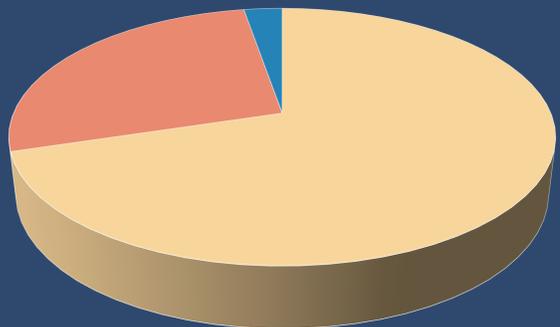
67%

of self-administered doses were unwitnessed by nursing staff (Figure 2)

40%

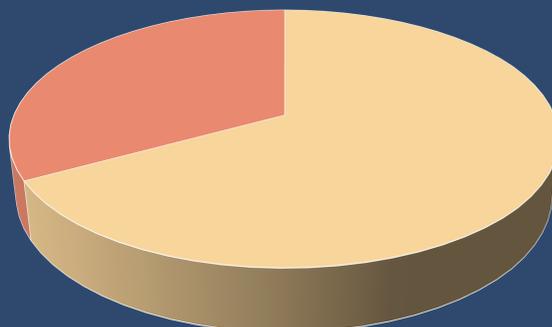
patients received education from nursing staff (Figure 3)

Figure 1
Medication dose forms with code 'S' recorded



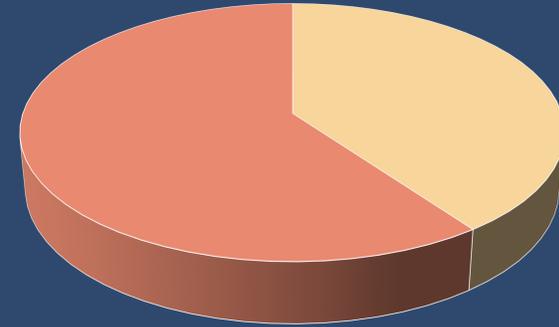
■ Inhalers ■ Eyedrops ■ Creams

Figure 2
Dosing observation



■ Unwitnessed ■ Witnessed

Figure 3
Education by nurses



■ Yes ■ No ■

Discussion

The audit confirmed there was mixed understanding by nursing staff about what signing 'S' for self-administration against a medication order means. Some administrations were unwitnessed by nursing staff, others were witnessed, and some nurses did both depending on time restraints. This understanding was not in alignment with NIMC guidelines on the use the administration code 'S'. Results were put forward to medication safety committee for review. As a result the 'nurse administration of medication' policy was amended. A statement was added, taken directly from the NIMC guidelines, clarifying what the use of the administration code S means, and that documented approval from the treating team is required for patients to self-administer medications. As a result of the in change of policy, in-services are being held across the medical and surgical wards to educate nurses of correct use of the code S, and to inform the staff of the policy regarding its use.

Conclusion

This small audit clarified and educated on the appropriate use of the NIMC administration code 'S'. Education about common medication delivery devices has also been provided to nursing staff in order to enhance their abilities to support patients in successfully self-administering medications such as inhalers..