Health & Healthcare News

Making sense of your medications

TOKYO — March 5, 2016 (CNS/Longwoods.com) — Our healthcare system can be an incredibly complex place, even for someone who works in pharmacy.

Like many of us, Ms. Emily Muring, who is the Executive Director of Pharmacy, Clinical Risk and Quality at the University Health Network, was faced with helping her own parents and in-laws access medical services in different caregivers and health facilities. With that, she found herself on a steep track of what was happening with their medications. To assist them, Emily developed a set of questions for them to ask their pharmacists. She designed it to help them understand their medication and ensure they left the hospital with their prescribed medications, which would also help facilitate the conversation with their new care provider.

Inspired by Ms. Muring’s experience of navigating her parents and in-laws through the healthcare system, the Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada, the Canadian Patient Safety Institute, Patents for Patient Safety Canada, the Canadian Pharmacists Association and the Canadian Society for Hospital Pharmacists have collaborated to develop a set of five questions to help consumers and their clinicians start a conversation about medications to improve communications with their healthcare provider. These five questions were tested by multiple researchers.

The five questions are:

1. Have any medications been added, stopped, or changed, and why?
2. What medications do I need to keep taking, and why?
3. How do I take my medications and how long?
4. How will I know if my medication is working, and what side effects do I watch for?
5. Do I need any tests and when do I book my next visit?

Medications are the most common intervention used in healthcare around the world. When used safely and appropriately, they contribute to significant improvements in the health and well-being of patients. The Canadian Adverse Events Study (Gibson et al 2004) found that 3% of all related events were the second most common type of adverse events in Canadian hospitals, accounting for 23.5% of the total. The cost attributable to these adverse events has been reported to be $4.12 million per year (Dichter et al 2011). Furthermore, more than half of Canadians are using prescription drugs on an ongoing basis with 67% taking 2 or more medications (Health Canada 2014). With millions of variables, many of which look or sound alike, medication can be incredibly confusing, miscommunication even more so. This makes it important for patients and their families to understand their medications.

From the patient’s and family member perspective, Muring observed how these questions will not inform patients as to the kinds of questions to seek their providers, but will remind providers of the importance of involving their patients in the conversation about their medication and care. Maryam’s daughter Martha died in 2012 after a series of errors. Because of these experiences, Maryam is a member of Patents for Patient Safety Canada, a patient-led red program of the Canadian Patient Safety Institute. “I think it was important for us to understand that Martha did everything she could to get better,” Maryam said. “She was in the healthcare system to get well. And a series of mistakes happened that ultimately cost her life.”

Some of these mistakes involved drug administration, about which different healthcare providers had opposing views on how to handle them. “The drug administered to her death was an uncommon drug that had been prescribed anyway,” Muring said. Martha was suffering from cardiac arrhythmia and 15 days after the dosage was increased, she died.

Martha was not aware of any serious risks or side effects and when she went to the doctor’s office complaining of episodes of racing heart, she was discharged having had attacks and feeling too weak. Maryam believes that what Martha had been part of the conversation, and had the opportunity to ask questions about her medication and treatment, her outcome would have been different.

“A safe patient is an informed patient. These five questions can start important conversations people need to have with their providers about their care plan,” said David L. President and CEO of ISMP Canada.

“Healthcare as we currently practice it is not a safe system as it should be or could be. We have to acknowledge that preventable harm is an industry issue,” said Dr. Peter Reiber, CEO of University Health network. “Questions like these highlight our patients and their families inability into the patient safety conversation in a way meaningful way.”

“Medication use is so common, and a lack of for many people these days to be consulted to find better ways to keep people safe,” said Chris Power, CEO of the Canadian Patient Safety Institute. “We believe these five questions will bring much needed clarity to complex situations and encourage anyone to ask them in every care setting across Canada.”

The five questions are featured in a downloadable handout at www.safemedication.ca. The handout includes important reminders about keeping your medication record up to date and asking your care provider to review all of your medications to see if they can be stopped or reduced.

Please see video here: http://d1nyb77xjy6p2j.cloudfront.net/IsmpCanada/MarthaVideo/mb.mp4

About Canadian Patient Safety Institute (CPSI)

The Canadian Patient Safety Institute (CPSI) is a not-for-profit organization that exists to enhance awareness and bulbun implementation of best practices to achieve transformation in patient safety. Funded by Health Canada, CPSI reflects the desire to close the gap between the healthcare we have and the healthcare we deserve. www.patientbsafety.ca

About ISMP Canada

The Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada is an independent national not-for-profit organization committed to the advancement of medication safety in all healthcare settings. ISMP Canada works collaboratively with the healthcare community, regulatory agencies and policy makers, provincial, national and international patient safety organizations, the pharmaceutical industry and the public to promote safe medication practices. ISMP Canada’s mandate includes analyzing medication incidents, making recommendations for the prevention of harmful medication incidents, and providing quality improvement initiatives. Information about ISMP Canada’s work with Canadian to prevent medication incidents is available at www.ismp-canada.org and also on www.GetSafemedication.ca, a website designed for consumers.

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