

THE MEDICATION SYSTEM TRACER GROUP DISCUSSION

Location:

The Medication System Tracer begins with a group discussion. The discussion is to occur in a location chosen by your staff; however, a conference room type of location is best. You will want an area that is not prone to interruptions, where the surveyor can converse with staff in a quiet, comfortable environment. The location should be large enough to accommodate the amount of individuals identified by your organization to participate in the discussion, plus the surveyor.

Discussion Participants:

Your organization has the option to select which individuals are to attend the Medication System Tracer group discussion. The surveyor may request specific staff members; however, generally the participants are selected by the organization. The following is a list of individuals commonly expected to participate in the Medication System Tracer group discussion. Organizations may wish to select more staff or fewer staff, dependent upon the size of the facility:

- The Director of the Pharmacy (consultant pharmacist or designated pharmacist knowledgeable in medication management processes, particularly medication selection and medication monitoring)
- Laboratory clinician
- Direct clinical care staff who have a role in medication management processes (physicians, nurses, dietitians, therapists, etc.)
- Clinical staff who may have a unique perspective about specific patient populations (pediatric nurses, pediatric respiratory therapists, oncology nurses, etc.)
- Patient/Staff educator (staff responsible for providing patient and staff education about medication management)
- Performance Improvement representatives (particularly if your organization has conducted or is currently conducting any PI activities associated with medication management)
- Biomedical safety staff involved in maintenance of medication management equipment or devices (for example, IV pumps)

THE MEDICATION SYSTEM TRACER ACTIVITY

The physical component of the Medication System Tracer will commence directly following the group discussion. The surveyor will review one (1) or more medical records, either alone or with a staff member in the area he/she has chosen to review the medical record(s). The surveyor will then select a medication to track or a category of medications to track throughout the facility. He or she will travel to various areas in the facility where the selected medication is stored, prepared, dispensed, administered and where the effects of that medication are monitored on the patient; in other words, the surveyor will travel to locations relevant to the medication management processes that your organization has in place to utilize the selected medication(s).

The surveyor may approach the tracing of the selected medication(s) in several ways. He or she may start by evaluating the medication management processes relevant to the use of the medication, in a systematic manner. This means the surveyor would most probably want to travel to the location where the selected medication is procured, stored and dispensed (the Pharmacy Department or satellite pharmacy) and move to the location where the medication is administered (possibly stored on a given patient care unit) and where the effects of the medication are monitored on the patient. In this instance, the surveyor would start in the Pharmacy and move to a patient care unit.

Another approach to tracing the selected medication would be a more direct approach, with the surveyor traveling to the unit where the medication was documented as being administered to the patient in the medical record reviewed. Once the surveyor has arrived on the unit, he or she will most likely discuss with staff on the unit, the medication management processes related to use specific to that unit. For example, the surveyor may ask staff how they acquire the medication, how the medication is stored once it arrives on the unit (including any special storage considerations, for example light sensitivity or refrigeration), how the medication is administered to the patient (again any special considerations pertinent to administration of that medication) and how the medication's effects on the patient are monitored.

Staff should be aware that the surveyor may discuss any issues related to the medication that may have been identified in the medical record reviewed. For example, if the surveyor noted that the patient had an adverse drug reaction to the medication, or if the medication requires specific laboratory values related to administration, he or she may ask the staff a more detailed line of questioning about the medication and the specific patient to whom the medication was given. In this scenario, the surveyor will need to travel to other areas of the institution and conduct discussions with various staff members, focusing on their participation in medication management processes related to the medication that is being traced.

MEDICATION MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

Because the Medication System Tracer's basic purpose is to explore your organization's medication management processes, it is important that staff involved in the Medication Management System Tracer group discussion (as well as any staff who might be interviewed during individual tracers or who may be asked to perform a medication management process) understand the Medication Management Processes as outlined by the JCAHO. The Medication Management Function (MM standards) requires that **six (6)** basic processes are conducted with the management of medications in the healthcare setting.

Remember, the **patient safety standards** place an emphasis on prevention of medical/health care errors, including medication errors. Additionally, one of the National Patient Safety Goals requires the healthcare organizations to improve the safety of using high-alert medications. You can anticipate your surveyor asking questions concerning practices your institution has in place to reduce the potential for medication errors for each "step" included in the six (6) basic processes.

Discuss each process with the individuals scheduled to participate in the Medication System Tracer group discussion, writing key elements of each process in the space provided below. Remember to include collaborative processes where appropriate and focus on medication error prevention. Be sure to include what your organization is doing to meet the National Patient Safety Goal of *Improving the Safety of Using High-Alert Medications*.

Medication Selection and Procurement

The surveyors will be looking at your organization's practices related to medication selection and procurement. A high focus will be placed on the organization's formulary and the criteria for medication selection and/or removal from the formulary. Your surveyors may be looking for selection criteria that includes:

- Indication for use
- Effectiveness
- Risks (including propensity for medication errors, abuse potential and sentinel events)
- Costs

The surveyors may also question:

- What your organization's process is to monitor patient responses to a newly added (to the formulary) medication before the medication is made available for dispensing or administration within the organization
- How your organization addresses approving and procuring medications that are not listed on the formulary or available within the organization