

The use of medicines in care homes for older people

Reference DH ALERT(2010)001
Category Immediate Action
Gateway Number 13238
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Action required	See points 4-5 inclusive below
Deadline (Action underway)	By 5 February 2010
Deadline (Action complete)	By 6 May 2010

Issue

1. A recent study, which was funded by the Department of Health, has revealed a high prevalence of errors in medications received by older residents of care homes.
2. The study examined errors in prescribing, dispensing, administration and monitoring of medications. The study is titled "*The Care Homes Use of Medicines Study: prevalence, causes and potential harm of medication errors in care homes for older people*". The full report can be found at: http://www.haps.bham.ac.uk/publichealth/psrp/PS025_Project_Summary.shtml
The research paper, which emanates from the work was published by the Quality and Safety in Health Care Journal (*Qual Saf Health Care* 2009;18: 341-346).
3. The main findings of the study were as follows:
 - residents (mean age 85 years) were taking an average of 8 medicines each;
 - on any one day 7 out of 10 patients experienced at least one medication error;
 - whilst the mean score for potential harm was relatively low, the results did indicate opportunity for more serious harm.

Action

4. Primary Care Trusts should work with their primary medical care contractors, providers of pharmaceutical services and social care partners to determine how medication errors in care homes for older people can be reduced. Primary Care Trusts should:
 - distribute this alert to primary medical care contractors, providers of pharmaceutical services and care homes for older people in their area.
5. Primary Care Trusts with primary medical care contractors, providers of pharmaceutical services and social care partners should:
 - review the safety of local prescribing, dispensing, administration, and monitoring arrangements in the provision of medication to older people in care homes;
 - establish a plan for effective joint working in the future, including auditing on-going progress.

Distribution

6. This alert has been distributed to:
 - Primary Care Trusts in England (Chief Executives)
 - Social services in England (Directors)
 - Councils with Social Services Responsibilities
 - Care Quality Commission (CQC) (Headquarters)
 - CQC Recipients

For action by

7. Primary Care Trusts (Chief Executives)
Primary Care Trusts (Medical Directors)
Primary Care Trusts (Directors of Commissioning)
Social Services
Registered providers of adult social care homes

Enquiries

8. Enquires on this alert should be addressed to:
 - pccs.team@dh.gsi.gov.uk (for primary care)
 - mpig.support@dh.gsi.gov.uk (for pharmacy)
 - Michelle McDaid or Alan Probett (for social care)
Telephone: 020 7972 4281 or 020 7972 4033
Michelle.McDaid@dh.gsi.gov.uk or Alan.Probett@dh.gsi.gov.uk