

## Good Practice Guidance A: Development of medicines policies in Care Homes

### Key Points

- A medication policy is required to ensure the safe and secure handling of medicines.
- It should clearly detail all aspects of ordering, storage, administration, disposal and recording of a medicine and should enable staff to work to the same systems when handling medicines.
- The policies and procedures for medicine administration should explain to care home staff what to do and how to do it safely.
- The document should take account of current legislation; official reports, guidelines, recommendations and professional codes of practice.
- Care home staff must have the correct level of training before giving medicines.
- Adherence to the medicines policy should be audited on a regularly basis and at least annually.
- Results of the audit should be disseminated to relevant staff in the care home and any necessary actions should be taken as a result of the audit.

### What is a medication policy?

Medicines include those medicinal products as defined by the Medicines Act 1968. These are substances administered by mouth, applied to the body, or introduced into the body. This may be for the purpose of treating or preventing disease, diagnosing disease or ascertaining the existence, degree or extent of a physiological condition, contraception, inducing anaesthesia, or otherwise preventing or interfering with the normal operation of a physiological function.

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### **Why do care homes need a medication policy?**

The Care Quality Commission document: Guidelines about compliance; essential standards of quality and safety states that; 'a provider should have clear procedures that are followed in practice, monitored, and reviewed for medicines handling that include obtaining, safe storage, prescribing, dispensing, preparation, administration, monitoring and disposal.' Care homes must therefore consider how to provide for the safe and secure management of medicines for their residents. There are two important safeguards that care homes must make sure are in place to protect the people they care for:

- written procedure for the administration of medicines, which is monitored to make sure that care home staff follow safe practice
- care home staff have the correct level of training before giving any medicines.

### **Legal requirements**

All aspects of manufacture, sale and supply of medicines are controlled by legislation. The legislation contains various exemptions, and it is important that the legal framework for a system is understood by those involved with medicines.

### **What should a medication policy contain?**

The policies and procedures for medicine administration should explain to care home staff what to do and how to do it safely. The document should take account of current legislation; official reports, guidelines, recommendations and professional codes of practice. The medication policy should be embedded in day-to-day practice and as a minimum, should contain:

- Procedure to assess competence of staff to administer medicines safely including staff training
- Procedure for administration
- What records are held
- How medicines are obtained for residents
- How medicines are stored, centrally and for self-administration
- Obtaining residents consent if care home staff give medicines
- Procedure to assess self-administration
- Procedures for providing medicines when residents take 'leave'
- How to deal with medication errors and incidents
- How to dispose of medicines
- Treatment of minor ailments

Other areas that are recommended within a medicines policy are:

- Procedures for handling CDs
- Information on fridge items and monitoring fridge temperatures
- The covert administration of medicines – if this is undertaken and if so in what exceptional circumstances (see Good Practice Guidance J: Disguising medicines in food or drink in care homes)
- Secondary dispensing of medicines – if this is undertaken and if so in what

exceptional circumstances (see Good Practice Guidance L: Secondary dispensing in care homes)

### **Audit**

Adherence to the medicines policy should be audited on a regularly basis and at least annually. Results of the audit should be disseminated to relevant staff in the care home and any necessary actions should be taken as a result of the audit.

An example NHS Oxfordshire Medicines Policy audit template is available which considers: Training; Ordering; Storage; Administration; Disposal of Unwanted Medicines; Use of patients Own Drugs; Controlled Drugs; Medicine Incidents; Medicine Safety Alerts; Admission to and Discharge from Hospital and Other Information

Also refer to Good Practice Guidance H: The handing of medication errors, incidents and near misses in care homes.

### **What resources can help me write a medication policy?**

- The Care Quality Commission (CQC) provides further information on managing medicines in care homes in Outcome 9 of the [CQC Essential Standards of Quality and Safety](#)
- The Royal Pharmaceutical Committee of Great Britain has produced professional pharmaceutical guidance for people in every aspect of social care who are involved in handling medicines called '[The handling of medicines in Social Care](#)' that is available on their website: [www.rpharms.com](http://www.rpharms.com)
- The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) provides guidance and [advice on a number of topics](#) which is available on their website; [www.nmc-uk.org](http://www.nmc-uk.org) including;
  - [The code: Standards of conduct, performance and ethics for nurses and midwives](#)
  - [Standards for medicines management](#)
- The National Patient Safety Agency also contains safety alerts related to medicines; <http://npsa.nhs.uk/>
- The CQC Pharmacy Tips and Professional Guidance have unfortunately been withdrawn by CQC so NHS Oxfordshire has reviewed and re-published some of the guidance to help support care homes.

*The above links are made available solely to indicate their potential usefulness to users. The user must use their own judgment to determine the accuracy and relevance of the information they contain.*

Oxfordshire CHUMS Working Group & Medicines Management Team

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Good Practice Guidance documents are believed to accurately reflect the literature at the time of writing. However, users should always consult the literature and take account of new developments because these may affect this guidance.



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