

Article: 1909

Topic: EPV42 - e-Poster 42: Quality Management

Using Visual Aids to Improve Communication with Patients About Medications: a Quality Improvement Project

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Introduction

Psychiatric patients who have difficulty remembering medication names experience problems communicating with their doctors about medication-related issues. Consequently, doctors often lack confidence in knowing which specific medications their patients are communicating issues about.

Objectives

To evaluate the use of medication picture charts as visual aids during outpatient clinic consultations in improving the confidence of doctors in knowing which specific medications patients are communicating issues about.

Aims

To evaluate the use of visual aids during outpatient clinic consultations in improving the confidence of doctors in knowing which specific medications patients are communicating issues about.

Methods

A survey involving 7 doctors running outpatient psychiatric clinics was carried out in 2 phases. In Phase 1, no visual aids were used. In Phase 2, doctors were given a medication picture chart to use at their discretion. Doctors categorised each patient they had seen into 4 levels of approximate confidence (100%, 75%, 50%, <20%) that they knew which specific medication the patient was communicating issues about. A comparison between the proportion of patients falling into each category in the 2 phases was made.

Results

The use of a medication picture chart in outpatient clinic consultations was associated with a 30.45% increase in patients falling into the 100% confidence group.

Conclusions

Using visual aids such as medication picture charts improves the confidence of doctors in knowing which specific medications patients are communicating issues about. Further studies are needed to determine if this translates to increased doctor-patient concordance on medication regimes and improved medication safety.