

Empowering Geriatric Patients About Their Medicines

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With an increase in life span, the geriatric population in our country is on the rise. Our seniors definitely need the acclaim, greater respect and better attention. With increasing age come more medicines and polypharmacy is commonly seen in the elders. In order to derive the expected benefits for themselves, the patients should have the ability to comprehend the medicine information, to make informed choices, to take their medicines effectively, and in turn enjoy the benefits of healthcare services.

It is the patient's body, health, suffering, and money; so the patients have the right to information about their prescribed medications and hence the care givers have the professional responsibility to appropriately inform, educate and enlighten the seniors. The seniors may have slow comprehension of the new information but are keen to pick it up. Healthcare professionals should respect the seniors.

The physicians due to paucity of time may not be able to provide the requisite time. But the nurses can play a vital role in providing structured individualized and evidence-based information to the elders. However, in practice it is provided in an ad-hoc, haphazard manner, usually at the

time of discharge from the clinic/hospital. It is essential to maximize the medication management by targeting not only the elders but the caregivers to the elders as well, through educational interventions. The benefits of a structured educational programme have been observed to reduce the patient suffering from symptoms of illness and also increase self-esteem, self sufficiency and decrease the dependence of the seniors on their caregivers.

The caregiver team should be involved in the patient medication education programme. The senior patients have the potential to live at home, hence should be made medically stable and maintained on individual medication regime. For this, individualized verbal counseling should be done during every medication round. This should be supported by written information of the patients' prescribed medications. The nurse should take the patients' individualized medication containers from the medicine trolley along with the prescription to the patient. A quiet environment should be ensured during counseling session and prescribed aids be used for demonstration. The seniors should be encouraged to handle the medicine containers, take out

the medicines, identify the same and made to repeat the given instructions, specifying the medication by name, strength, and dosage. The concerns of seniors should be observed, encouraged to be voiced, and answered fully to the patient's satisfaction in the language understood by them.

The seniors should be informed the difference between the medication record card and prescription. If the senior is found to be unsuccessful with the education programme, the family member / caretaker should be involved. Multifold increase in the patients' knowledge of their prescribed medications has been reported after such counseling. There are also indirect benefits to these patients when they are referred to the other concerned specialists and the needed appropriate prosthesis, ambulation aids, physiotherapy, exercises, diet, eye sight correction and hearing aids are recommended to them. With concern and supportive strategies, the senior patients feel more in control of medicines they take and confident while leaving the hospital. Most patients report having difficulty with reading the small font size, name and dosage on the shiny packs. It is imperative

that the pharmaceutical industry take a note of this and address the specific needs of the elders.

The nursing staff have lauded the discharge process of seniors after such interventions and found it to be smoother with fewer subsequent phone calls from family members, to general practitioners and pharmacists. These interventions facilitate the process of the discharge prescription to be understood correctly. Nurses initially felt that there was a lot of paperwork, but later realized the importance of interventional benefits. They recognized such program's role in empowering patients within the rehabilitation setting.

This approach could be transferred to most settings of the healthcare system. Medication education programmes are supported by evidenced-based literature suggesting that tailored education programmes for the elders highlight the benefits of counselling, and written information in self sufficiency of senior patients. The role of the nurses in it has the potential to reduce the financial costs to the health service and can improve the health and well being of the seniors.