



Q&A

with Lee B. Murdaugh, RPh, PhD, Operations Director, Cardinal Health

Pharmacy's Role in Meeting JCAHO's National Patient Safety Goal 3D

JCAHO's National Patient Safety Goal 3D requires that hospitals "label all medications, medication containers (e.g., syringes, medicine cups, basins), or other solutions on and off the sterile field in perioperative and other procedural settings." In a Q&A with PP&P, accreditation expert Lee Murdaugh addresses pharmacy's role in compliance with this goal.

Q: What is the pharmacy's role in meeting JCAHO's National Patient Safety Goal 3D?

A: First of all, I think the pharmacy needs to be very involved in any committees or teams that are working to meet this goal. If a committee hasn't been set up to meet this goal, pharmacy should be proactive and create one. It should be a collaborative process between all of the disciplines that are directly and indirectly

involved with this particular area. The pharmacist's main role is to provide education about labeling and to help their hospitals find and evaluate labeling supplies. After all, pharmacists are the experts on medication labeling. I have found, in many hospitals, pharmacy has not been involved in the ordering of the medication labels to meet 3D, and the surgery department or other

department ordering the supplies may not realize that certain products are not acceptable to meet this goal. Pharmacy can also help the committee to decide how they want to show the hospital's compliance with the goal through quality monitors and documentation.

Q: What particular products would you recommend people use to meet the goal?

A: Actually, it's pretty simple – sterile labels and sterile markers. Since the goal came out, a lot of companies are promoting products that meet the goal. However, pre-labeled containers are not acceptable. The label is to be prepared

and applied at the time the medication or solution is placed in the container; otherwise, hospitals run the risk of filling a pre-labeled container with the wrong medication or solution. So don't label the container until you are preparing the product.

That said, you can use pre-printed labels, and I recommend that you do so. Pre-printed labels are more legible than handwritten ones, and printing labels beforehand can save time and ensure uniformity in the way information is presented, which adds an extra layer of patient safety. The labels must contain the information required by JCAHO standards and applicable laws and regulations.

Q: Is tall-man lettering a good idea?

A: Yes, it is a good idea for look-alike, sound-alike drugs. You should consult ISMP's list of look-alike, sound-alike drugs to determine what drug names should be displayed in tall-man lettering.

Q: Are most hospitals already in compliance with this patient safety goal?

A: No, and I think it's important to point out that this goal involves not only the labeling of medications, but also other solutions, such as saline, water, skin cleansers, chemicals, reagents, and cytology fixatives. The goal covers all of these items, but they often fall through the cracks. When I visit hospitals, I find that people don't know that other solutions have to be labeled.

Q: What are the typical barriers to compliance?

A: First of all, it has to do with how people were trained. Many times, I'll hear people say, "But this is how I was trained to label things." So re-education is often necessary. People also perceive that it will take too much time to label things the right way. Hence, perceptions and culture are often the biggest barriers to compliance, although this varies from institution to institution.

Q: How should hospitals document their compliance with the goal?

A: There should be quality monitors in place for observing a hospital's practices. And even though it is time-consuming, I would recommend verifying that everything on and off the sterile field is properly labeled during the "time out" period prior to any procedure. I find a lot of non-compliance for containers that are off the sterile field, and all of these, including containers on anesthesia carts, should be labeled, per the goal.



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Q: Are there certain practice areas that hospitals need to keep an eye on?

A: Areas outside of surgery, like endoscopy, heart catheterization, imaging, and other so-called special procedure areas, including areas where bedside procedures are performed. Invasive procedures take place in those areas, and therefore, medications and solutions in those areas need to be labeled.

Q: What other advice would you offer pharmacists as they seek to comply with this goal?

A: Pharmacy should establish a very good working relationship with the surgery department and other procedural departments. Until recently, pharmacy departments in hospitals rarely interacted with personnel in those areas. So step out, meet these people, and see what is going on in those areas. Secondly, get involved with any team or committee that works with medications in procedural areas; establish a network and a good working relationship, as well.

I would also advise pharmacists to do some research on the Internet. The Joint Commission's website has a lot of resources to help hospitals comply with this goal, as does the ASHP site. In addition, ISMP and the Association of Perioperative Registered Nurses (AORN) are excellent sources of information. AORN's toolkit for

safe medication administration won an award last year, and they have an excellent guidance statement called "Safe Medication Practices in Perioperative Practice Settings." I advise pharmacists and all members of a hospital's compliance team to check out these resources. ■

An operations manager with Cardinal Health Pharmacy Management, Lee B. Murdaugh, RPh, PhD, has worked at Cardinal for nine years. In her current role, her primary duties are JCAHO accreditation and medication safety assessments for Cardinal's member hospitals. She received her BS in pharmacy and PhD in toxicology from the University of Tennessee.

WHERE TO FIND IT: Sterile Markers and Labels

Vendor	Reader Service	Website
Helapet Limited	86	www.helapet.com
Medline Industries, Inc.	1	www.medline.com
Medi-Dose/EPS, Inc.	85	www.medidose.com
Porex Surgical Products Group	84	www.porexmedical.com
RMAC Surgical Inc.	76	www.pharmatags.com
Sandel Medical Industries	78	www.sandelmedical.com
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