Ensuring robust systems are in place to safeguard both patients and nurses

New RCN guidance on advanced preparation of insulin syringes

Nurses in primary care have for many years drawn up insulin syringes in advance so that patients with diabetes who are unable to use an administration device, or who have some other impairment that prevents them doing this for themselves are able to take the pre-prepared insulin and self-administer. This has helped patients maintain their independence and has reduced the need for multiple visits from nursing teams that may not be convenient to the patient, as well as being time consuming for the team.

The RCN recognised that this practice was causing some consternation and confusion because there was no information relating to how many days in advance insulin syringes could be prepared, safe storage, and other practical and clinical concerns and in 2006 produced guidance to help nurses understand their role and responsibility in doing this. The guidance was widely accessed by nurses, as well as being cited by a number of pharmaceutical companies and the NMC.

The guidance was withdrawn in 2013 because advances in devices to support administration of insulin and in the insulin itself meant that it was no longer fit for practice. Following this withdrawal, the RCN received significant numbers of calls for advice from nurses who were being put under pressure to prepare insulin syringes in advance due to reduced number of staff, increasingly frail people needing someone to administer their insulin, and employers wanting to reduce the costs of visits and travel. As there was an obvious need for some guidance, a task and finish group was convened to review and rewrite the guidance to reflect the changes in diabetes management and the need to provide robust advice to prevent adverse incidents that could harm patients.

A number of issues were addressed in the new guidance including the need to recognise that the advanced preparation of insulin is in fact secondary prescribing and under the medicines act is an unlicensed procedure. Therefore, robust systems should be in place to ensure that this is only undertaken in exceptional circumstances, and that a number of safeguards are in place.

The task and finish group identified areas of good practice and used these to recommend that the advanced preparation of insulin should only be undertaken if the organisation has put in place the following:

- There must be an organisation-wide policy covering the use of pre-loaded insulin syringes
- Patients must be assessed and have full capacity for this practice to be considered, and patient capacity must be routinely and frequently re-assessed
- A senior diabetes specialist nurse (SDSN) must be involved in the initial patient assessment; this risk assessment should be updated on a regular basis
- Comprehensive training on pre-drawn insulin for self-administration must have been undertaken
- A patient care plan
- A quality assurance plan, which is overseen by the local SDSN
- The patient’s GP is aware that this is being proposed and is in agreement and aware of the medico-legal implications

The guidance also sets out what the patient needs to be able to do, and provides examples of documentation so that organisations have a clear understanding of what they need to do.

There are too many adverse incidents reported in relation to insulin administration to take shortcuts, and the RCN is clear that patients and nurses need to be safeguarded to avoid these happening.

The guidance is available on the RCN website and we would urge that any nurse being asked to prepare insulin syringes in advance is really clear that they meet all the requirements in the guidance and work with their employer, their diabetes specialist nurse, pharmacy and the medicines management team to ensure that all the safeguards are in place before providing this service.
Making your Hosiery Selection Happier

• Works out sizes
• Recommends hosiery by condition
• Shows the hosiery ranges at a glance

Download it now appsolutely FREE! from www.activahealthcare.co.uk