

# Nurses wearing tabards improves safety in administering medicines



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## Context

Colchester Hospital University NHS Foundation Trust (CHUFT) is a busy 600-bed acute district general hospital with 1200 nurses on 30 wards, serving a local population of 370,000.

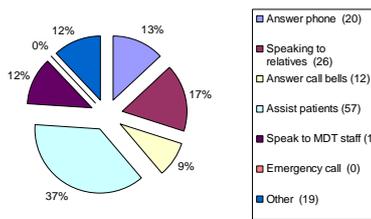
## Problem

- Significant drug administration errors were occurring
- Root cause analyses implicated distraction to nurses during the "drug (administration) round"
- Interruptions during the drug round also led to prolonged delays in administration of medicines, resulting in sub-optimal care of the patients.
- All these led to low morale among the nursing staff, as their productivity was being undermined.

## Problem Analysis

- A **2-week audit** of interruptions and time taken on the 0800, 1200 and 1800 medication rounds was undertaken on a large Care of the Elderly (COTE) ward; where most patients required significant nursing support.

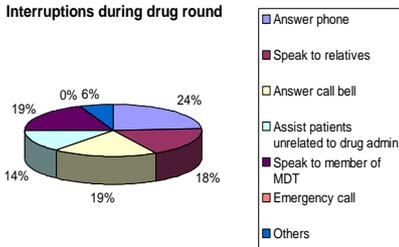
Types of Interruptions during Drug Rounds



- A **1-month trial** followed in which nurses wore red tabards during drug administration, noting:

- the number of interruptions
- the total number of medicines administered per patient
- the time taken to complete the round.
- The results showed a **28% reduction** (111 from 153) in the number of interruptions, giving an impetus for an extended trial.

Interruptions during drug round



## Strategy for Change

- A **3-month extended trial** on two large COTE wards was approved.

The **aims** were to:

1. prevent delay in patient's drug treatment
2. decrease the number of interruptions during a medication round
3. increase confidence and promote best practice among nursing staff
4. decrease the number of medication incidents
5. decrease the length of time taken to complete a routine medication round.

- The results from the 1-month trial were used to achieve buy-in.
- Senior nurses coordinated training and logistics for purchasing and laundering the tabards.
- Active paper and electronic publicity were employed.
- The findings were shared with the Trust.

## Measurement of Improvement

The aims of the three-month trial were satisfied:

1. The time taken for **08.00** medication round was **reduced from 108 minutes to 70 minutes.**
  - This nursing time/efficiency saving was **£14,180** per ward per year.
2. The number of **interruptions reduced by 71%.**
3. Overall comments from staff were very positive.
  - medication rounds completed quickly
  - other aspects of care delivered promptly
  - greater confidence and feeling safer during rounds.
4. There were only 3 medication incidents reported during the trial period.
5. There was on average a **9-min reduction** in the time to complete the **18.00** medication round.
  - There was no significant difference in the time taken for a 1200 medication round.



## Effects of Changes

1. Reduction in time for drug round
  - Benefits include:
    - patients receiving their medication in a timely manner
    - trained nurses having more time to undertake other nursing activities
2. Reduction in interruptions
  - Potentially reducing the number of medication errors
3. Staff morale
  - Overall, staff were very positive and appreciated the protected time to undertake this vital nursing role.
4. Trust-wide implementation
  - Trust executive approved a phased roll out of the red tabards as a safety tool on all wards.
  - Using tabards for drug rounds is now CHUFT policy.

## Lessons Learnt

- Staff should be given protected time for the high-risk activity of administering medicines.
- A simple tabard says "do not disturb", and empowers the staff member to say "no" to interruptions for less urgent tasks.



## Message for Others

- Safety solutions can be simple, but yet effective.
- The red tabards are now being piloted for staff undertaking final checking activities in Pharmacy, and the principle can be applied in almost any sector where staff concentration is important.

