A specialist pharmacist linking the acute and psychiatric services has reduced the delay experienced from hospital admission to psychiatric expertise.

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A NEW PHARMACY ROLE IN GENERAL HOSPITAL LIAISON PSYCHIATRY

When mentally ill people are admitted to general hospitals, effective liaison psychiatry results in better patient outcomes and reduced length of stay (1). However, studies in our institution suggest that routine referrals can take 14 days from hospital admission, and only occurs in a third of patients taking medications for mental health conditions(2).

Objectives

To determine if a novel, pharmacist driven referral pathway can improve patient access and reduce the time delay associated with referrals.

Method

A pharmacist referral system using real-time dispensing information and direct reports from ward pharmacy teams, was developed to identify hospital in-patients receiving antipsychotics, mood stabilisers or dementia medicines. A specialist pharmacist reviewed the patient and referred to psychiatric liaison services if indicated. Data were recorded in line with Caldicott ethical guidelines.

Results

Between 17/09/2012 – 28/10/2013 the pharmacist made 41 referrals to psychiatric liaison services, accounting for 45% of the total number of referrals in this patient cohort.

The mean time from hospital admission to pharmacist referral was 4.4 days (107 hours, SD: 110 hours). Increased access to psychiatric services was also seen with 47% (n=138) patients being referred representing a 14% absolute increase from baseline.

Conclusion

A reduction in the delay from admission to referral was achieved by developing a specialist pharmacist as part of the link between an acute hospital and psychiatric services. Increased and timelier access to psychiatric liaison services as facilitated by pharmacist referrals may reduce the length of stay for these patients. It is also leading to better patient outcomes, less inappropriate prescribing and cost improvements.

References

2. Schneider C et al. Using hospital pharmacy dispensing records to categorise referrals to the RAID service: a preliminary study. IJPP; 2012;20:35

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