Data Snapshot: Did You Ask the Patient?

Access to accurate and up-to-date drug allergy information is a vital component to effective, safe, and timely patient care. The first step in capturing accurate drug allergy information is collection and reconciling of the information. We should give this task the same attention we give to medication history and reconciliation. Allergy documentation is a fluid process requiring additions and deletions over time.

The roles of individuals in recording allergy information vary. Documentation is not enough; detailed, meaningful information must be documented to trigger the appropriate cautions for drug allergy interactions. Therefore, it is imperative to involve patients and their caregivers in the process of recognizing and documenting allergies.

The following reported events were submitted under the protection of the ECRI Institute PSO and reviewed by patient safety analysts for sharing lessons learned.

Case Study Events

A patient was admitted to the hospital with exacerbation of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and required the placement of a chest tube. The clinician ordered Norco (hydrocodone/acetaminophen) for pain management. The patient had a documented allergy to Norco with a reaction of nausea. Nausea is considered to be an intolerance rather than an immune-mediated reaction. Based on the information entered in the chart, the pharmacist approved the administration of Norco. The nurse called the pharmacy for clarification because an allergy to Norco was listed in the patient’s electronic health record (EHR). Upon checking with the patient, the nurse learned that the reaction to Norco that the patient experienced was swelling and difficulty breathing. The staff corrected the allergy reaction type in the chart and the pharmacy updated the patient’s profile and notified the clinician to order an alternative to the Norco.

In another incident, the emergency department clinician wrote an order for tetracaine. During the pharmacy verification process, it was noted that the patient had a documented allergy to procaine. The pharmacist called the patient’s nurse questioning the order. The nurse stated that the allergy was entered in error. The pharmacist instructed the nurse to confirm the allergy information with the patient. The patient confirmed that the allergy to tetracaine was correct. The patient’s actual reaction was to Novocain, which converted to the generic procaine when entered into the EHR. The patient stated that she had safely used lidocaine and bupivacaine in the past.

Contributing Factors

Incomplete and inaccurate allergy entries in the EHR affect future prescribing, dispensing, and administering and can lead to patient harm. Previously listed or inaccurate information is rarely removed from the patient's chart. EHRs that do not allow for complete documentation of the allergy history also contribute to the problem. In order for the documentation of allergies to trigger appropriate clinical decision support (CDS), all facets of the allergy history must be entered into the patient's record.

Lessons Learned

The Partnership's recently published Safe Practices for Drug Allergies—Using CDS and Health IT recommends the following:

- Engaging patients through the use of technology to improve accurate drug allergy communications
- Using patient-facing technologies such as patient portals, personal health portals, and mobile pharmacy apps will improve drug allergy safety
• Addressing the patient's allergy list at each encounter to ensure accuracy
• Incorporating structured documentation fields in the technology that can fully capture all facets of the allergy information to appropriately trigger external CDS

Increasing patient engagement in the process of reconciling allergy information allows for accurate, up-to-date drug allergy information. Technology provides methods for patient engagement in the reconciliation of allergies through patient review and verification of information.

Conclusion

As seen in these case studies, engaging patients to provide further clarification of their allergy history and the nature of their allergic reactions prevented harm. Patients can identify and correct information that has been erroneously or incompletely entered. Patient engagement in the allergy reconciliation process is key to the creation and maintenance of meaningful allergy lists to ensure the EHR contains accurate, up-to-date information.

Important Announcements

Registration Open for 2019 Annual In-Person Meeting

Join your colleagues at the Inn at Villanova on September 12, 2019, for our annual meeting, Taking Action: Making Health IT Safety a Reality. Included in this year’s agenda is information from the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology; an opioid update from EHRA; Partnership project updates; and two interactive expert panel discussions: "Driving a Culture of Safety" and "Making Health IT Safety a Reality." We look forward to your participation.

To obtain more information and register for the meeting, click here.

Partnership News

New Podcast
Our new podcast, "Health IT Improves Opioid Prescribing," was released on July 9th. In this podcast, we address safe practice recommendations for opioid prescribing. It can be found here on the member website.

Latest Toolkit
Our latest toolkit, Safe Practices for Drug Allergies—Using CDS and Health IT, has been released. The toolkit addresses how the use of health IT can help implement existing recommendations to prevent potentially harmful medication interactions.

As we did in the past, we are asking you to lend your support for these safe practices and asking you to share the toolkit with your colleagues:

• My Organization Supports the Safe Practices for Drug Allergies—Using CDS and Health IT
• I Support the Safe Practices for Drug Allergies—Using CDS and Health IT

PSO Webinar

We Want to Hear from You

Let the Partnership know if you are experiencing issues with new technologies—telehealth, m-health, wearables, or others. Start the conversation by emailing your responses and questions to hit@ecri.org.

Collaborating Organizations

Need to Submit an Event?

Partnership participants can submit events through your membership portal.

If you need assistance, please contact us at hit@ecri.org.

Get in Touch with the Partnership

Do you have questions about any of these articles? Get in touch with us today by emailing hit@ecri.org. If you wish to submit information for this publication, please submit items using the subject line "Partnership Update" to hit@ecri.org.

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