



5th August 2011

Gateway No: 16496

To: SHA Chief Executives, SHA Medical Directors, SHA Pharmacy Leads, NHS Primary Care Trust Chief Executives, NHS Primary Care Trust Medical Directors, NHS and Foundation Trust Chief Executive Officers, NHS and Foundation Trust Medical Directors (onward to Chief Pharmacists), NHS and Foundation Trust Directors of Nursing

Dear Colleague,

Guidelines for design of in-patient prescription charts

We are writing to you to draw your attention to work undertaken by the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges in liaison with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and the Royal College of Nursing on improving the design of in-patient prescription charts in hospitals.

A study commissioned by the General Medical Council¹ showed an unacceptable rate of prescribing error amongst all grades of doctor in hospitals. The researchers considered that the design of in-patient prescription charts was one factor contributing to errors. Whilst most of the errors identified in the study were prevented from reaching patients by pharmacists, this remains a matter of concern.

The Department of Health has been working to coordinate and stimulate various improvement areas in relation to safe use of medicines, including education and training and good practice guidance.

To this end, the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges was commissioned in late 2010, by Sir Bruce Keogh, the NHS Medical Director, to work with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and the Royal College of Nursing to guidelines for the design of in-patient prescription charts. These are not Quality Standards but represent consensus from across the professional groups. These guidelines have now been published and can be found at:

<http://www.aomrc.org.uk/projects/standards-for-in-patient-prescription-charts.html>

These will be of great use for all organisations and staff involved in the use of medicines to ensure that patients receive their medications safely and effectively. We ask that you carefully consider them. For example, you should consider benchmarking your in-patient prescription charts against these recommendations and subsequently whether there is a need to take action to improve the drug charts used within your organisation.

For organisations considering replacing their in-patient prescription charts, we would like to advise you that work to produce a standard chart is being undertaken by the Royal College of Physicians who will make their recommendations in due course. For further information, please contact Professor John Williams at john.williams@rcplondon.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely,



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NHS Medical Director
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Dame Christine Beasley
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Dr Keith Ridge
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer
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¹ http://www.gmc-uk.org/FINAL_Report_prevalence_and_causes_of_prescribing_errors.pdf_28935150.pdf