Life, Death & Modern Technology – An Update

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Background

The initial question raised in 2012 asked this pertinent question.

‘Could greater patient and professional awareness together with modern technology assist in preventing mortality?’

Data presented in 2012 identified a lack of steroid management knowledge in both patients and hospital staff. As a result of this, three areas of steroid management were addressed;

• Patient education through a ‘Steroid Pack’ and its electronic format
• Endocrine & steroid awareness of Qualified Nurses
• Documentation of steroid therapy in case notes

Implemented Improvements

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Audited Update

The steroid pack, QR code and patient video were audited (55 responses from 120 questionnaires sent out)

• Steroid pack – after receiving the Steroid Pack, 20% more patients now know the symptoms of a crisis compared to previously. 87% know when to double their dose and 83% found the pack helpful; however only 50% knew when they would need an emergency injection.
• QR Code for steroid pack – A QR code was set up enabling the Pack to be downloadable to Smart phones, solving the ‘on the go’ problem. 64% found this helpful.
• Patient video – 29% more patients than previously, now know how to administer an emergency hydrocortisone injection following the production of a patient video. For those with internet access 86% found this useful. Worryingly, 63% still did not have an emergency injection at home.

Improvements

• Endocrine Awareness teaching sessions – An audit of qualified nurses (78 returns from 500) showed that 60% did not know what an adrenal crisis is, with 56% not knowing that steroids should not be stopped abruptly. However, 76% knew to contact the endocrine team if a patient on steroids was unwell. Endocrine awareness teaching sessions now run bi-monthly to address the lack of steroid awareness.
• Steroid/Endocrine Stickers & Endocrine stamps - The case notes for all steroid dependent patients coming through the department are now issued with tailored warning stickers and alert stamps. A steroid database has been set up.
• Steroid protocol for Trust – Steroid protocol written for Trust Grey book and Intranet

Future Plans

• Audit of case notes for warning stamps & stickers in 2015
• Assignment of ‘Blippar’ to upgrade electronic resources
• Audit of nurses trained in endocrine/steroid awareness
• ‘Flag’ alert on eprescribing and EPR

Conclusion

Lessons learnt:

• There is a vital need for the education of both staff and patients to reduce the risk of patients developing an adrenal crisis.
• Providing reference resources in hard and electronic formats provides access to vital information whether at home or away.
• It is imperative that patients have an emergency hydrocortisone injection at home and that they know how to use it.
• That education of qualified nurses in how to care for steroid dependent patients helps to safeguard patients who are hospitalised.
• The use of warning stickers, alerts and stamps ‘flags up’ steroid dependence in vulnerable patients.

With a few simple steps the answer to the question posed is YES, modern technology and greater professional & patient awareness could assist in preventing mortality in patients who are steroid dependent.

References

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