

GUEST EDITORIAL

The importance of preventing medication errors cannot be stressed enough. Each year, hundreds of medication errors occur and many more go unreported. The articles contained within this supplement focus on how to reduce medication errors, their relation to human factors design, the legal and financial implications, continuum of care, and the implementation of physician's orders for desired patient outcomes.

Preventing medication errors has become a cornerstone of patient care. Taking precautionary measures to reduce medication errors is of paramount importance regardless of the clinical setting in which care is delivered. The reduction of medication errors begins with the education of healthcare providers. Through education, clinicians learn the therapeutic dosage ranges for intravenous medications, recognize potential errors, and practice ways in which to prevent them. In short, the better prepared the healthcare provider is, the more positive the outcome for the patient.

Nurses, physicians, and pharmacists must work collaboratively to avoid these errors—this process includes: educating those individuals providing direct patient care about the medications they use; stressing the need for staff members to freely question prescriptions that appear incorrect; and insisting that the physicians print their orders carefully or use pre-printed order sheets to ensure accuracy in drug ordering. Knowledge is power, and we must fully use it to safeguard our patient.

The following pages of this supplement contain five articles that focus on the recognition of medication errors and preventive measures.

Human Factors: Medication errors can occur even as a simple human oversight. With the use of advanced technology and upgraded product designs, medication errors can be significantly reduced.

IV Medication Errors: Of paramount concern, medication errors can be avoided and reduced through education, using auto-dose rate calculations, and risk management. However, it is important to recognize both the cause and effects, as well as the legal implications involved.

Legal Implications and Risk Management: Unfortunately, these two factors play significant roles in the event of a medication error and affect both the patient and provider. To achieve a positive outcome, it is crucial to understand the keys to managing risk and liability, as well as the legal implications, including pain and suffering of the patient.

Continuum of Care: Often, medical devices play a role in medication errors. Through human factors and product selection, errors can be reduced, thus providing positive patient outcomes and cost-effective care.

Implementation of Physician's Orders for Desired Patient Outcomes: Clinical studies performed by IVAC have shown that procedures for critical care, pediatric, and adult patients have resulted in a reduction in medication errors.

Sharon M. Weinstein, RN, CRNI, MS

This Journal Supplement has been made possible by an educational grant in part from IVAC Medical Systems and focuses on the importance and prevention of medication errors, and the subsequent impact on positive patient outcomes.