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Patient-centred management of polypharmacy: a process for practice

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Background & Aim: Evidence associates polypharmacy with increased adverse drug events, hospital admissions, increased healthcare costs and non-adherence. There is a paucity of evidence-based guidance around reducing and stopping medication (deprescribing) which incorporates the patient perspective. Our aim was to develop a patient-centred medication review process to encourage a collaborative (patient and clinician based) approach to inform decisions around deprescribing and address polypharmacy as part of overall strategies to optimise medicines for the patient.

Method: A review of UK and international literature on polypharmacy and deprescribing showed that the medication focus is from a clinician's viewpoint. Using existing resources, clinical knowledge and practical experience, a 7 step cycle was developed which encompassed the patients perspective. This is supplemented with points to consider, actions to take and questions to ask to reduce polypharmacy and undertake deprescribing safely. The process has been piloted through medication reviews by 15 UK pharmacists on 82 patients in care home and domiciliary care settings. Evidence based tools including STOPP/START and other UK guidance were used during the process.

Results: The 7 steps cycle, recently published in the European Journal of Hospital Pharmacy, has been cited by UK National Health Service (NHS), academic and professional bodies.

Pilot data showed the average patient age was 82 years. 60 (73%) were present during the reviews. The total number of drugs prescribed was 605 (n = 80) and 133 (22%) were stopped. There was a reduction of 1.9 drugs per patient.

54 (66%) pharmacists rated the extent to which the steps enabled them to understand the patients experience as very effective or effective.

Conclusions: The patient-centred approach to reviewing polypharmacy and deprescribing combines both the clinical health professionals and patient perspective. This approach is paramount to effective engagement by all parties to optimise medicines for the patient.