

Are you mixing the wrong meds?

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If you have an arsenal of multi-colored, multi-shaped, tongue-twisting prescription drugs in your medicine cabinet to treat a variety of ailments, it may be tough to simply remember what to take and when – let alone recite your medications every time you see a doctor.

The problem can be particularly difficult for seniors, who may be taking several prescription and over-the-counter drugs. But help is on the way during the Madison Patient Safety Collaborative's Patient Safety Awareness Week from March 7-11.

Throughout the week, medication safety seminars and one-on-one consultations with pharmacists will be held at Madison senior centers to help answer important questions about everything from drug interactions and supplements to the cardiovascular risk associated with medications like Vioxx and Naprosyn.

“Overall, the more medications you're on, the more concern you have for whether things are going right or wrong,” says Kendra Jacobsen, administrator of the Madison Patient Safety Collaborative (MPSC).

“Certainly, seniors are on more medications at one time than many non-seniors,” added Jacobsen. “So they represent a very good group of people who potentially have a lot of questions about their medication therapy.”

Patient Safety Awareness Week includes events that are free and open to the public at the following locations:

West Side Senior Center (602 Sawyer Terrace, Madison)

Monday, March 7

- **11am: What You Need to Know About Your Medications: Keeping Yourself and Your Family Safe**
- **9am-2pm: One-on-one medication counseling with a pharmacist**
Consultations are available in 30-minute time slots. To sign up for an appointment, call ahead at 608-267-5889.

Madison Senior Center (330 W. Mifflin Street, Madison)

Friday, March 11

- **10am: Cleaning Out Your Medicine Cabinet**
- **11am: From Calendars and Boxes to Electronics: Aids to Compliance**
- **1pm: Keeping You and Your Family Safe: Poison Prevention Strategies for Adults**

- **1:45pm: Vioxx, Naprosyn, etc., and Cardiovascular Risk: Gaining Perspective**
- **2:30pm: There's No Way That Herbal Could Have Interacted With My Medicine! – Or Is There?**
- **9am-noon and 1-4pm: One-on-one medication counseling with a pharmacist**
Consultations are available in 30-minute time slots. To sign up for an appointment, call ahead at 608-267-5889.

Established in 2000 with the lofty goal of making Madison the safest community in which to receive health care, the Madison Patient Safety Collaborative comprises hospitals and medical groups aligned to improve the quality and safety of patient care.

Collaborative members include:

- [Dean Health System](#)
- [Group Health Cooperative of South Central Wisconsin](#)
- [Meriter Hospital](#)
- [St. Marys Hospital Medical Center](#)
- [University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics](#)
- [UW Health Physicians](#)
- [William S. Middleton VA Hospital](#)

Though the members of MPSC are competitors in Madison's health care market, they work together to share and implement patient safety solutions – ranging from the prevention of falls among hospital inpatients to eliminating error-prone abbreviations in prescription drug orders.

Quality over competition

The overriding theme of the MPSC's work is that quality and patient safety should not be a competitive issue. And that theme is apparent when collaborative members gather each month to share ideas and discuss how methods are working for each hospital or medical group, says Sue Pelatzke, vice president of quality and care management for UW Health.

“It's almost as though everyone checks their identity when they walk in the room,” says Pelatzke. “The way we operate is, ‘Let's solve safety issues together. Let's learn from one another. Let's share what's worked and what hasn't worked.’”

Though the project has become a nationwide model for similar cooperative initiatives in the health care industry, Pelatzke and other members of the MPSC say the collaborative wasn't necessarily formed with a trailblazing intent.

“We're not doing this because patient safety is the topic du jour. We're doing this work simply because it's the right thing to do, and because we all want to make Madison the safest place in the country in which to receive health care,” Pelatzke said.

Initiatives of the MPSC have been wide-ranging since its inception, including a project to prevent surgical site infections a hand hygiene initiative for Madison health care workers.

Implementing changes

The collaborative's patient safety initiatives are changing the way things are done at area hospitals and clinics. Because of the MPSC's work to reduce patient falls, more patients are being identified earlier for potential fall risk.

At Meriter Hospital, patients used to be categorized as being at either no risk, moderate or high risk for falling. Because of the ideas and evidence from other MPSC members, Meriter patients are now placed at universal risk for falling.

"It's just like you need universal precautions for bloodborne pathogens. It's the same idea," says Mary Zimmerman, internal consultant for quality at Meriter.

"It's shifting to thinking that anybody who is in a hospital – people who are sick or having surgery, who are in an unfamiliar environment and who are anxious and probably weakened in some way – everybody's at some increased risk for falling," added Zimmerman. "And there are certain things we need to do for every patient."

From modifying the way patient rooms are set up to making sure IV poles and other patient equipment are out of the way, the project has resulted in more than a 50 percent reduction in patient falls at MPSC hospitals.

Training and safety

Among the collaborative's upcoming goals is to establish a Patient Safety Center that would help bring a more organized approach to key patient safety education for physicians and medical staff.

"There's a long laundry list of potential topics we could cover," says Zimmerman, who is also the MPSC chairperson.

Zimmerman said health care workers gave a "tremendous response" to a collaborative survey gauging the level of interest in educational opportunities such a center could offer. In the absence of a building to actually house such a Patient Safety Center, the collaborative is already offering training and education opportunities at member hospitals and clinics.

Zimmerman says another high priority of the MPSC this year is participation in the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's "100,000 Lives Campaign," a nationwide initiative enlisting thousands of hospitals in a commitment to prevent avoidable deaths.

As a partner in the initiative, the MPSC will support area hospitals as they implement quality improvement changes recommended by the IHI to save lives. Those measures

include establishing “Rapid Response Teams” to examine patients at the first sign of decline. Such teams can be summoned at any time by anyone in the hospital to assist in the care of a patient who appears acutely ill and may be headed for cardiac arrest.

The IHI says such specialty teams are necessary because, despite advances in treatment for cardiac arrest, only 17 percent of patients who experience a cardiac arrest survive to discharge. However, those survival rates are higher when the patient is already in a monitored unit, such as an ICU.

Patients as health care partners

Though MPSC hospitals and medical groups are continually working to improve patient safety, patients also play a key role in making their health care experience safer. Though people may think they play a passive role as a patient, there are many ways they can be active members of their health care team.

One way to help is to keep accurate lists of medications they’re taking, and bring it with them every time they see a doctor. On a wallet-sized card provided by the MPSC, patients can also write down and share their medical history, allergies, conditions and supplements.

Since medication safety starts with accurate communication between the patient and providers, wallet cards can help patients convey what they are taking, in what doses, and why. In emergency situations when a patient is unable to communicate, the wallet cards could prove to be particularly valuable.

“I think it’s a new concept for patients to realize they have a part to play in keeping themselves safe and healthy. More and more organizations and providers are realizing that they need this kind of help, and the patient is the perfect partner in that,” says Jessica Bartell, MD, MS, chief of disease management and a practicing internist with Group Health Cooperative.

Learning from the competition

In the MPSC, collaboration begins at the highest levels of the member organizations – which means the group’s monthly meetings are a who’s who of Madison health care administration. But with competition checked at the door, collaborative members “use each other shamelessly” for ideas to improve patient safety, says Donald Logan, chief medical officer of Dean Health System.

“Sure, we don’t talk with each other about our current plans for business success, but we’re very comfortable talking about patient safety,” says Dr. Logan. “On that, we are absolutely on the same team.”

The sentiment is echoed by Jeffery Jones, MD, chief of staff at the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital.

“We are pleased to have the opportunity to learn from the other hospitals in our community, and at the same time share progress and programs in patient safety improvement that have been developed by the VA,” says Dr. Jones.

And the collaboration doesn't just stay at the top of the organizations involved in the MPSC – the vision of improving patient safety flows from the chief executives right down to the front-line health care staff.

“Madison is fiercely competitive, but we have visionary health care leadership who just decided that patients come first, and that's the bottom line,” says Chris Baker, a clinical nurse specialist at St. Marys.

“At all levels of our organizations, we're working together, hearing new voices and seeing new perspectives,” Baker added. “And that's why I think this collaborative is going to have benefits way beyond patient safety.”