

Quality Qorner

Right On!

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In a project for my master's degree, I had asked my staff to help draft a mission statement for our transfusion service. Here's what we wrote more than 20 years ago: "Our transfusion service's mission is to provide the right patient with the right blood component of the right blood type for the right reason at the right time." I can't claim total originality for those words because we borrowed heavily from the nursing-pharmacy mantra to provide "the right drug in the right dose by the right route to the right patient at the right time." Blood is classified as a drug by the FDA; therefore, the analogy of our mission statement to that for medications held true. An added benefit when sharing our mission statement with our hospital's nursing staff was that they would also consider blood as a drug and apply the "rights" appropriately when it came to blood transfusions. Any instance of hemolytic transfusion reaction would have been the antithesis of our mission—and we had no such instances in the 20 years I worked at that hospital.

Enter the concept of the "5 Rights of Laboratory Testing," recently provided to the health care environment by Sunquest, vendor of a popular laboratory information system. At the recent CLMA annual meeting, Sunquest exhibit booth staffers distributed laminated cards printed with the 5 Rights: "Ensuring that the right patient has the right test performed at the right time for the right indicators leading to the right diagnosis and care plan." I suggest that each clinical laboratory, each pathologist, and each clinical laboratorian internalize—and live—this statement.

Ensuring that the 5 Rights always happen for each and every patient doesn't occur in a vacuum. The best-intentioned staff cannot realize these Rights for patients if there isn't a solid quality infrastructure to support them. Let's look at which aspects of quality management are crucial in giving the 5 Rights a fighting chance of success.

The Right Patient

Getting the right patient every time requires having rock-solid policies for what constitutes proper patient identification; processes for ensuring that the right identification gets onto the patient him or herself (especially on trauma patients needing transfusions!); and instructions for how and when to identify patients (and what to do if they're not) that every health care professional understands and follows every time. The concept of having written policies, processes, and procedures applies whether or not your hospital or laboratory uses bar-coded systems.

The Right Test

Getting the right test ordered includes the important activity of inviting the input of nursing and medical staffs when designing laboratory test requisitions and computer screens so that it's easy for them to find and make the correct selection. We underestimate the importance of presenting spaces for information on a requisition form or computer screen in a logical order—as opposed to the common practice of slotting

in areas for information based on where we can make them fit. Well-designed forms reduce the likelihood of handwritten entries that cannot be read, or can be misread and misinterpreted.

The Right Time

In-control QC, accurate calibrations, and historically concordant performance on proficiency testing challenges is totally moot if the samples for therapeutic drug monitoring aren't collected at the right time or if stat samples are piling up in the sample receiving area because the process doesn't allow for faster throughput, or if the patient isn't fasting as needed. When asked what practitioners want most from the laboratory, one of the top two answers is always getting results in a timely manner to support diagnosis and treatment. Your laboratory's preanalytic, analytic, and post-analytic processes need to be devoid of barriers that unnecessarily lengthen turnaround time.

The Right Indicators

Pathologists, laboratory scientists, and practitioners need to agree which tests should be ordered at which times for specific patient conditions. Evidence-based practices and published practice guidelines can be used to manage patient care, along with excellent publications on uses for laboratory tests. Your laboratory may need to initiate conversations with the medical staff on this issue so that limited resources are used for testing that makes a difference in patient care.

The Right Diagnosis

There's no question of the immense value of laboratory testing in helping physicians diagnose patients or monitor treatment plans. However, ensuring continued value is not possible without also ensuring the accuracy of laboratory test results. That results are consistently accurate and reliable is the second of the top two "wants" expressed by practitioners for laboratory services. Your laboratory's analytic processes and systems need to be controlled and monitored to constantly meet this need.

The 5 Rights of Laboratory Testing are an important addition to the Patient's Bill of Rights and summarize our most important contributions to patient safety. I'm sure our transfusion service's long-ago mission statement helped clarify our contribution.

This Month's Quality Quote:

"The great man does not think beforehand of his words that they may be sincere, nor of his actions that they may be resolute—he simply speaks and does what is right."

—Mencius



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