

Training lags for nurses

Practice nurses must be trained to use clinical software to keep medical records accurate and up to date.

THE rapid increase in the number of nurses employed in general practice has created a few problems in information management.

The major problems have been caused by a lack of a suitable orientation and training in practice information systems.

There have been cases where a new practice nurse has been told to prepare a GP management plan and health assessment. Just imagine the difficulty for a new nurse, who may have previously worked in the emergency department of a hospital. He or she is confronted by a strange world of item numbers, unfamiliar clinical software and a group of GPs who are so time-poor they have no time to supply training.

The result of this lack of training in the practice computer systems is poor clinical practices. Examples include:

- Measurements such as BP, height/weight and family/social histories entered directly into health assessments or care plans where they are 'buried' and not part of the clinical record.
- The same measurements entered directly into the progress notes with the same result.
- Reasons for contact or diagnoses not coded correctly.

Using an agency for contract nurses can also cause issues for the accuracy of clinical records. Often these agencies have their own templates, usually in Microsoft Word, when nurses visit the homes of the over-75-year-olds to do a health assessment (item 702). Information is typed into these templates and at the conclusion of the assessment, a printed copy is supplied to the GP.

All the measurements, allergies, family/social histories, smoking and alcohol status

never find their way into the GP's clinical software. Clinicians doing follow-up work with these patients find it incredibly difficult to access the clinical information of those patients, especially in practices moving towards a paperless system.

Solutions are simple:

- Take the time to train the nurse. You should have a position description that outlines the nurse's duties. Contact your local division about support and training for nurses and evening functions specifically aimed at the upskilling of general practice nurses.
- Provide a correctly set-up workstation with access to the clinical software for the nurse.



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- If you use an agency for nurse support insist that the clinical data they gather is accurately re-entered into your clinical software.

Practices often lose their practice nurse because of the frustration caused by the lack of guidance.

I recently trained a nurse in filling out a health assessment. She did all the right things — recording measurements, checking the medication and past history lists for inaccuracies — but only then opened a template in Medical Director, filled it out and saved it.

A job well done until the patient went to see the GP after seeing the nurse. The GP didn't know how to open the saved template and had to redo the assessment. ●