

DRAFT 'My best ever clinical audit' (copyright CASC)



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Background: Stephen has worked in audit since 1995 and formerly managed Leicestershire Primary Care Audit Group. He has been involved in developing a wide range of local and national clinical audit tools and his 'best ever audit' looks at a local project from the late 1990s that he played a lead role in.

Title: An interface audit assessing the management of patients on lithium

Audit details:

Lithium is a drug widely used in psychiatric practice for the treatment and prophylaxis of bipolar and depressive disorders. Due to its narrow therapeutic index with serious toxic potential at high levels and variation in dosage requirements, it is a drug that requires regular monitoring. In 1997 concerns were raised across Leicestershire that patients on lithium were not being appropriately managed in accordance with national guidelines and this led to the setting up of a multi-disciplinary steering group to look into the problem.

The steering group consisted of a number of key individuals, including: general practitioners, consultant psychiatrists, pharmacists, local clinical audit managers and a consultant chemical pathologist. It was agreed that an initial audit should be conducted across GP surgeries in the county and initially 17 volunteered to take part. The initial audit was based on the data collection form established by the Eli Lilly National Clinical Audit Centre and over 100 patients receiving lithium therapy were audited.

The initial audit showed that patients were not being managed appropriately with many not getting regular thyroid and renal function tests. Just 59% of patients had their lithium levels checked in the previous 3 months. The outcome of the audit was to introduce a Leicestershire-wide lithium register that established a system to ensure timely measurement of blood lithium levels in patients taking the drug and the secure transmission of results to relevant professionals.

How the audit improved patient care:

Within a year of setting up the centralised register the initial audit was repeated and this showed a vast improvement across all audit criteria. Significant improvements included: 95% of patients had their lithium level checked in the previous 3 months (previously 59%), 95% of patients had their renal function checked (42% in audit 1) and 99% of patients had their thyroid function checked (60% in audit 1). In addition, all patients were provided with an information leaflet explaining details of the new register and a subsequent survey of patients found that most preferred the new system. In addition a follow-up survey of local clinicians found that 88% preferred the new system mainly as it ensured patients were being regularly monitored. The benefit of the register was monitored via annual re-audits and within three years of the initial audit over 500 patients were placed on the register ensuring the regular monitoring of their illness and care.

Key success factors:

- 1) The audit topic was relevant, important and linked to patient safety matters
- 2) The small steering group was made up of key senior motivated individuals
- 3) The initial audit invited voluntary participation from local GP surgeries with provision of a user-friendly and simple data collection form.

Further information:

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