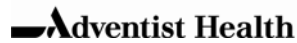


## *Ukiah Valley Medical Center*



Oct. 20, 2009

### *Local Health*

#### *Medication Reconciliation... A Team Sport*

*By Terry Burns, UVMC President/CEO*

Ever since we discovered the great benefits of penicillin, our culture has been on a journey exploring new medicines with ever greater life-improving and life-saving qualities. The downside to this however, is the difficulty of managing so many medications and their potential interactions. Health care providers must constantly monitor their patients' medications. In the hospital, the process is called medication reconciliation.

We ask: What medication was the patient on when he got to the hospital? What will he receive during his hospital stay? What medication will he continue to take after he's discharged from the hospital? Do all the medications interact well with each other?

The medication reconciliation process is crucial in reducing unintended medication interactions and medication complications, some of the leading causes of injury to hospitalized patients. When patients move into or out of the hospital, they are vulnerable to this kind of problem.

One recent study found that 30-70% of patients have disparities between the medications they actually took at home prior to hospitalization and what was listed on their hospital admission papers. Another study discovered that more than 12% of patients experience an adverse drug event within two weeks after being discharged from a hospital. This is a problem across the nation, and no one has yet found a good solution.

Although it may seem that keeping track of a list of medications should be simple, as with so much in life, it is more complicated than it first appears. Many of us have more than one doctor and more than one pharmacy. We get lists from each, and then try to put them together ourselves. Of course some of the lists include trade names and others include generics. If we do put the lists together, we often don't share it with our primary doctor for review.

Each time any one of your doctors changes your medications, the change needs to be communicated with everyone else who prescribes medications for you. Unfortunately, no well conceived system exists to assure this happens. It's up to you to share the information with everyone. If you are taken to an emergency room or admitted to a hospital, you may be seen by a doctor who does not know you, and depends on you for a medication history. Depending on your condition, you may not be in a position to provide this information.

Many hospitals, like Ukiah Valley Medical Center (UVMC), have Medication Reconciliation teams working to ensure that all patients always get the right medications. Locally, the hospitals and emergency services providers are encouraging all community members to take part in the “File for Life” program. This program is sponsored by the Area Agency on Aging and provides people with a simple way of communicating with local health care teams.

A simple form is placed on your refrigerator, and a sign that identifies you as a “File for Life” participant is placed on or near your front door. When emergency personnel arrive at your house and see the “File for Life” sticker, they know they can retrieve all your most up-to-date medical information by grabbing the file off your refrigerator door. This allows them to confidently proceed in providing your care. They know what medications you are taking, what medication allergies you may have, and details about your health history.

At UVMC, we also use advanced computer systems to ensure the accuracy of our medication administration. Computerized documentation allows us to print a current list of medications for patients when they are discharged. The list remains securely on our computer, so the next time you come to visit, we can see what you were taking last time you were in the hospital. Clearly, the downside would come if your medication regimen changes between visits. That is why it is so important for you to work with your primary doctor to keep your medication list updated each time there is a change. It is also important to participate in the File for Life program so emergency personnel know where to find the most current information, should you require an unexpected trip to the hospital.

Improving our medication reconciliation process can have a great impact on the health of local patients. But it only works with your help! Working together, your hospital, doctors, pharmacists – and most importantly you – can assure that you always receive the correct medication at the correct time.