April 27, 2016, Warrenville, IL (Special) – Time is of the essence, and saving time for nurses in med preparations at skilled-nursing communities is a reachable operational efficiency according to a unique new study by researchers at the University of North Texas in Denton, Texas. The study showed savings gained by using strip packaging for oral medications over bingo card packaging can total more than 1,200 hours of nurse time per site or nearly $40,000 annually. For an organization of 20 communities, the savings could approach $1 million a year.

The study, the first to focus exclusively on med packaging as an important part of the daily med-prep process in skilled-nursing communities, compares the use of strip packaging for oral medications to the use of bingo cards with striking results.

Bingo-card packaging in the study consisted of 15- or 30-count single-dose blister cards with nurses punching each tablet out of the blister. Strip packaging consisted of a seven-day supply of medications contained in strips of clear tear-off single-dose packets. The packets were printed and sorted within the strips by resident, day, and administration time.

After analyzing data from med-pass observations at two similar skilled-nursing communities, researchers found that strip packaging produced significant savings in time and other benefits; strip packaging saved some 44 seconds per resident over bingo cards on average, and six minutes for the study’s average med pass of 15 residents. Translating these time savings into potential costs saved by a typical U.S. skilled-nursing community shows a nursing home could save enough to hire an additional nurse in most regions.

A key differentiator in the overall process, according to the study findings, is the need for nurses to punch out single med doses from individual bingo cards into a cup and return the cards to the resident’s space in the med cart.
Strips, on the other hand, can be accordion folded, cut with scissors, and the meds poured in all at once.

Overall, the study indicates that the use of strip packaging, when compared to bingo cards, results in “time savings for nurses, fewer interruptions related to med preparations, and less multi-tasking during med preparations.”

Additionally, the research indicates that the time saved gave nurses the opportunity to provide more “person-centered care and resulted in more-satisfied nurses;” and that the fewer interruptions (and opportunities for errors) and less multi-tasking during med preparations in the use of strip packaging were significantly beneficial.

Interruptions related solely to med-prep issues, e.g., missing medications or no refill ordered, accounted for 37% of interruptions in the bingo-card communities compared to only 18% of those in the strip-packaging communities. Multi-tasking took about 29 seconds longer in the bingo-card communities.

Sponsorship for the study was provided by Symbria®, an organization that develops and provides innovative products, programs, and services for senior-living and post-acute-care providers on a national basis.

“Any savings produced by medication packaging presents an opportunity for skilled nursing communities to improve operational efficiency and financial performance,” said Symbria CEO Jill Krueger in announcing the results of the study.

“We were pleased to confirm that our pharmacy’s strip packaging system can save time in preparing medications for administration and reduce the number of interruptions nurses experience during med passes. We wanted the rigor of an academic study of the strip packaging system and the results corroborate the anecdotal benefits.”

To obtain the methodology and complete survey data and analysis, email info@symbria.com.

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