

Guidelines for Use of Medical Protocols

Approved by the Connecticut Board of Examiners for Nursing February 4, 2004

History of the Issue

The use of medical protocols has been a topic of discussion and source of concern for SBEN and DPH, and discussed at SBEN meetings for some time now. Specifically, there was concern that medical protocols may not provide adequate parameters to guide registered nurses in carrying out the medical regime. In addition, there was concern that there was a wide variation in understanding and practice related to medical protocols, and there was a desire to develop some guidelines to assist in taking a consistent approach to evaluating protocols during the survey process.

The Connecticut Hospital Association assembled a small work group to discuss the issue. As one could ascribe multiple meanings to the term “medical protocol,” an agreement on a definition was given priority attention by the group. Thereafter, recommended elements for medical protocols were developed, and circulated to members of the Conference of Nurse Executives. Feedback was collected and further discussed at a conference meeting in March. At a meeting of the work group thereafter, next steps were discussed. Among these was the development of this memorandum, which articulates the definition of medical protocol with examples from various settings and the guidelines for use.

Definition

A medical protocol is considered to be a set of predetermined criteria that define appropriate nursing interventions that articulate or describe situations in which the nurse makes judgments relative to a course of action for effective management of common patient care problems.

Examples of Medical Protocols

Acute Care Hospitals

Protocols for: heparin administration
insulin infusion
management of patients having seizures
pain management
wound care
ADL/progressive mobility
dietary management

Rehabilitation Hospitals

Protocols for: self-administration of Metered Dose Inhalers
self-administration of small volume nebulizers

Long-Term Care

Protocol for: anticoagulants for atrial fibrillation

School Health

Protocol for: Heparin IV Lock Care

Home Care

Not currently using

Guidelines for Use of Medical Protocols

- 1) There should be a prescribing practitioner's order initiating the use of the medical protocol for a particular patient.
- 2) The medical protocol should include a timeframe for required evaluation for continuation, and order renewal.
- 3) The medical protocol ordered should be "individualized to the patient," meaning that the protocol is ordered after an evaluation of the individual patient's clinical circumstance.
- 4) Monitoring parameters, including indication of when and under what conditions the prescribing practitioner is to be notified, should be clearly articulated.
- 5) Medical protocols should be defined and described in writing, and readily available to practitioners.

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