Costs of prevention are dwarfed by the costs of failure

The stand-out message from this year’s Global Patient Safety Summit, held in Germany last month, is that there is big money in prevention. Patient harm is estimated to be the 14th leading cause of the global disease burden, putting it on a par with TB and malaria.

A report presented to the summit by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development estimates that $28 billion has been saved in the US since 2015 by improving safety. The major causes of errors – medication, falls, infections and pressure ulcers – are central to nursing practice. Although this is well known, what is new is the analysis from global health policy experts identifying the most effective interventions for reducing harm.

Across developed and developing countries, they found that investment in professional education and training came out top, followed by building a positive culture in which people feel safe to raise concerns. Top-down directives don’t work, whereas staff who are invested in, listened to and included as partners react, adapt and lead quality improvement.

The theme of this year’s International Patient Safety day on 17 September is Danger is Silence. What better time to hear nurses roar?

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PERILS OF GIFTS AND LOANS

Why does my manager says it’s unethical to lend a patient my DVDs? Marc Cornock advises

Let’s assume that this is not a reference to copyright infringement issues and that you are not going to let your patient keep the DVDs but are just loaning them for a specified period. Your manager is likely referring to an inverse gift-giving scenario – instead of you receiving a gift from your patient, it is you who is giving the gift, even though it is just a loan and not a permanent gift.

Although in this case the normal situation is reversed, the unethical issue your manager seems to have concerns about is how giving a gift to a patient can be interpreted, and whether you are adhering to the Nursing and Midwifery Council code.

A gift from one person to another could be seen as a way of exerting power or manipulating a situation. If, for instance, a patient gives a nurse a gift to ensure they receive preferential treatment, this could be problematic.

No expectations

Similarly, you need to ensure that by lending a patient some DVDs your action is not misconstrued. Your patient needs to be aware that there is no expectation they will reciprocate in any way and that no payment of any form is required.

You need to have a full discussion with any relevant members of your team and your line manager and obtain their agreement about what you are intending to do. You will also need to decide what will happen if the patient does not return the DVDs. A record will need to be made in the patient’s notes about this for clarification.

You say you visit this patient as he has no relatives or friends nearby and is quite lonely and that he finds great enjoyment in watching films but is unable to buy them for himself. Your thoughtfulness in providing your patient with a form of entertainment is generous, and provided it is dealt with appropriately it should be viewed as such.

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