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Medication Errors During Arbaeen: A Hidden Challenge in Health Services

Milad Ahmadi Marzaleh [1], Zahra Eskandari [2,*]

[1] Clinical Education Research Center, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran
[2] Department of Prehospital Emergencies, School of Nursing, Alborz University of Medical Sciences, Alborz, Iran

[*] ***Corresponding Author:*** Department of Prehospital Emergencies, School of Nursing, Alborz University of Medical Sciences, Alborz, Iran. Email: z.eskandari@abzums.ac.ir

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Dear Editor,

The Arbaeen March is one of the largest religious and peaceful mass gatherings in the world, bringing millions of people from around the world to Karbala each year (1). The lack of health facilities in the host city can create serious problems and risks to people's health (2). Despite apparent efforts to provide health care to this large population, serious safety challenges, such as medication errors, remain hidden.

Based on the authors' field experience as medical staff attending this ceremony on multiple occasions, one of the most critical challenges for clinics serving pilgrims—particularly along the Karbala route—is the occurrence of medication errors and the lack of a structured system for reporting, recording, and learning from them.

Medication errors are a complex issue that can arise at any stage of the intricate medication prescribing process. Statistical evidence confirms the alarming extent of these errors, which affect patient safety and the quality of health care (3).

Contributing factors include congestion and noise in health care settings (4), lack of access to patients' medication records (5), inadequate communication skills among health care staff (3), high workload, staff fatigue (6), and a shortage of skilled personnel (7). This failure to report errors, in turn, allows them to remain hidden. The result of this silence is the continued repetition of errors and the loss of valuable opportunities for learning and prevention.

Practical measures that policymakers can plan and implement to reduce medication errors include the following: 1) designing and establishing a voluntary, nonpunitive, and confidential electronic reporting system; and 2) conducting short, standardized, and mandatory predeployment training courses on medication safety for all health care staff, covering topics such as identifying high-risk medications and accessing patients' medication histories. Pilgrims are also required to record their medication summaries, complete their vaccinations, and carry their chronic disease medications before the journey. The scientific community and health policymakers are urged to take a fundamental step toward enhancing pilgrim safety by conducting in-depth research and optimally allocating resources; breaking the silence surrounding medication errors will be the first essential step in this endeavor.

Footnotes

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