

Provision of assistance with medication administration
17HDC01168, 18 September 2018

*Home support agency ~ Support worker ~ Medication administration ~
Handover ~ Complaints procedure ~ Right 4(1)*

An 87-year-old woman lived in her own retirement village apartment. A home support agency was contracted to provide the woman with medication assistance, in particular with taking warfarin, a blood-thinning medication that requires regular administration at the same time each day.

On five occasions over the period of a week, a relief support worker was engaged to provide support to the woman, as the woman's regular support worker was unwell. The relief support worker had not had any medication training or competency checks in 10 years, and had not received the training required for support workers to oversee clients taking warfarin, as outlined in the home support agency's warfarin policy.

The relief support worker was given a handover via a telephone call, but was not given instructions on where to find the woman's medication box, or on the administration of warfarin. She did not administer the warfarin on her second and third day of providing support, and failed to alert the call centre of this.

A few days later the woman was admitted to hospital with an ischaemic left leg and required surgical intervention. The ischaemia was thought to have been caused by her missed doses of warfarin.

The woman's daughter made several complaints to the home support agency — both verbal and written — regarding the failure to administer warfarin; however, she did not receive a response.

Findings

The support agency failed to provide the relief support worker with the training required to administer warfarin according to its policies, and failed to provide her with clear handover instructions. It was also noted that despite the woman's son highlighting the issue of missed medication with the home support agency on two previous occasions, it failed to improve its services. For these reasons, the home support agency did not provide services to the woman with reasonable care and skill, and therefore breached Right 4(1).

Adverse comment was made regarding the home support agency's complaints management system. The home support agency was reminded that complaints can be lodged in a number of ways — in person, by telephone, or in writing — and that all complaints should be acknowledged and responded to in a speedy and efficient manner.

Adverse comment was also made regarding the relief support worker's failure to alert the call centre when she did not provide the woman with her warfarin. The

relief support worker was reminded of the importance of effective communication in the interest of patient safety when expected duties cannot be fulfilled.

Recommendations

It was recommended that the relief support worker and the home support agency provide a written apology to the family.

It was recommended that the home support agency:

- a) Ensure that all support workers and relief support workers who are required to work with medication have completed medication training and have achieved competency, and that current competency is maintained at all times.
- b) Audit the call centre selection of support workers according to the required competency for the selected job in order to ascertain whether the updated employee database is providing for the appropriate selection of skilled support workers. If the results do not reflect 100% compliance with appropriate selection, the support agency is to consider further improvements that could be made to ensure compliance.
- c) Develop and implement a formal handover policy that ensures a systematic approach to handover that contains all essential information to support and enable staff to provide adequate service.