

report

by Marielle Ngoy

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Healthcare Transformation to Eradicate Medication Errors

Introduction

Medication errors have been responsible for the deaths of many patients in the United Kingdom. According to ¹³ national estimates published in the BMJ Quality and Safety Journal, over 237 million medication errors are made every year in England. These errors are mostly avoidable and they cost the NHS over €98 million annually and result in over 1700 deaths every year (BMJ, 2020). The damages resulting from medication errors have been identified as a global issue, following the increasingly complex healthcare needs and the development of many new drugs and treatment procedures. In response to the gravity of the situation, the World Health Organization is working to ensure that the number of avoidable errors is significantly reduced.

²³ It is essential to note that medication errors can happen at any point in the healthcare delivery process: prescribing, dispensing, administration, and monitoring. Most ¹³ of the errors occur at the point of administration, accounting for 54% of the total errors. 21% of the errors occur during prescribing, and 16% during dispensing (BMJ, 2020). Even though error rates are lowest in primary care, they still account for approximately 38% of the errors due to the size of the primary care sector. In contrast, care homes experience the highest error rates (42%) despite attending to fewer patients than the other sectors. Approximately 1 in 5 medication errors occur in hospitals. Most medication errors are minor (72%), while just under 26% of these errors can cause moderate harm. Only 2% of medication errors can potentially cause serious harm, including death. Even though this percentage appears insignificant, it is critical to note that life is fragile and nobody should lose their lives due to medication errors.

The case study highlights a medication ¹⁶ error that resulted in the death of an Air Force veteran. According to the report issued, the patient visited ¹⁶ Dorn VA Medical Centre in South Carolina with nausea and vomiting. During administration, he received doses of pegfilgrastim

instead of filgrastim, which had been prescribed. Even though ³ both medications are administered by syringe and work to stimulate the growth of white blood cells, only filgrastim can be taken daily. After spending 11 days at the hospital and receiving multiple doses of pegfilgrastim, the patient developed pulmonary toxicity and died due to severe acute lung injury. This case illustrates how medication errors can lead to avoidable deaths, which can be very painful for friends and family members of the deceased.

Given the adverse effects that result from medication errors, it is necessary for healthcare leaders to make transformations to ensure that patients no longer lose their lives due to medication errors. Following the death of the 64-year-old veteran, the leaders at VA medical centre made some transformations to address the problem and to ensure that such cases do not arise in the future. This case report highlights the transformation that took place to ensure that the performance of the organization improved in the years that followed.

4Ps of Leadership

In any organization, leaders usually have a pivotal role in pushing for changes, especially changes to help the organization improve performance. As leaders, it is essential to consider the 4Ps of leadership: purpose, priorities, potential, and progress. The purpose feature requires the leader to question and confirm the purpose of the change strategy. In this case, the purpose for change was to ensure that no more lives are lost due to medication errors. In the described incident, a veteran lost his life due to a mistake that could have been avoided. Not only was the loss painful to his family members and friends, but the federal government also lost a significant amount of money in settlement payments. These events illustrate the potential adversities that could arise from the such errors, creating the need for an intervention that would result in the reduction or elimination of unnecessary medication errors.

The next factor that leadership has to consider is priorities. This step requires taking the time to analyse the situation and determine what is important to the institution and the greater good. After analysing this situation, it was evident that the priority was to promote patient

recovery and improve patient outcomes. These outcomes are only achievable if the staff attending to the patients perform their duties diligently and avoid making errors that could be fatal and life-threatening. Once this priority had been established the next factor to consider was the potential that that the institution possessed.

When addressing the potential factor, leaders analyse the situation by considering where they are coming from and where they would like to be when the implementation of the change is complete. In this scenario, the unfortunate death of the veteran due to a medication error resulted in negative publicity. This meant that people learned about how the staff member had made a mistake that had cost the veteran his life, and grief for his family member and friends. Looking forward, the hospital wanted to be a place where patients would feel safe and confident that they were in good hands. This would make the hospital one of the best places for patients to seek healthcare services, due to the positive reputation that the change was projected to bring.

Finally, the leader has to evaluate the progress of the intervention regularly to determine its effectiveness. Regular evaluations can show whether the change is achieving the desired result. If the outcomes are not as good as required, the leader can implement extra measures to ensure that the project is back on track to achieve the desired outcomes. Above all, it is critical for a leader to know thyself and determine whether they have the elements of leadership. Leaders need to have essential skills that will help them in their leadership, that is, skills needed to lead the team to successfully implement and embrace the change.

Henry Mintzberg Lens

Over the years, several scholars and researchers have developed many management theories. Henry Mintzberg is one such person, and his theory accurately illustrates the daily roles of managers in various sectors and positions. He argued that managers must play ten different roles and must switch among them whenever necessary. These ten roles are ²⁶divided into three primary categories: interpersonal, informational, and decisional (Eason, 2021). The

ten roles are a reflection of the complexity of the managerial position, whereby any manager has several duties in relation to the organization, superiors, subordinates, stakeholders, and shareholders.

The first cluster of managerial roles is the interpersonal cluster which includes figurehead, leadership, and liaison (Dandalt, 2021). For the figurehead role, the manager serves as the professional representing the organization in social events and activities. In such events, the manager's role is establishing robust relationships with subordinates and peers. When fulfilling this role, managers can excel at this by exercising empathy and compassion, which makes them good role models. When one is considered a good role model, it becomes easier for them to influence other organizational members to embrace and practice change. This requires leading by example, where the leader can do something and the others will follow suit. Looking back at the case study, a leader that excels at this role can show other staff members that it is possible to attend to patients without making avoidable mistakes. Thus, when the leader has successfully attended to patients and all this information is well-documented, other staff members will strive to match their manager's efforts, resulting in an overall improvement in how the hospital handles its patients.

The leadership role is related to motivating and inspiring people. Managers performing this role must support, coach, and guide their subordinates. The manager also encourages, inspires, and builds the morale of the team members (Dandalt, 2021). Managers can establish and maintain lasting relationships with their team members by evaluating their performances and coaching them when necessary. This role also requires emotional intelligence as it will help establish a relationship that is built on trust. In the case study, the manager can obtain the records of each team member to determine the number of medication errors that they might have made in practice. After establishing the error rate, the manager can talk to the affected parties to determine the reasons behind the errors. They can also discuss ways of reducing medication errors and help the staff members become more competent in their roles.

The manager's role as a liaison requires them to exchange information with various teams, departments, and external stakeholders. This role is important because liaising with other organizations, government representatives, and competitors is critical for professional development (Dandalt, 2021). Referring to the case study, the manager could identify hospitals that have the lowest percentage of medical errors and perform a benchmark activity. During this activity, the manager could learn more about the practices that help these organisations attend to patients without making mistakes. The manager can then share this information with his team to help them become better and reduce the number of times that they make mistakes when handling patients.

The informational cluster comprises of roles that require the manager to manage, monitor, communicate, and distribute information at all levels. The roles included here are monitor, disseminator, and spokesperson (Powell et al., 2022). As a monitor, the manager is responsible for collecting information that can help the organization maintain a competitive advantage. Achieving this outcome requires the manager to assess the market for any variations and gather relevant data that could affect the institution. These stages are critical in the process of strategic management as they help organizations survive the competition. Given that the healthcare field is dynamic and ever-evolving, hospitals have to adapt to various situations to stay ahead of competition. Medical errors have been well-documented as significant causes of deaths in hospitals. As such, patients often look at statistics about the medical error rates in hospitals when selecting which hospital to visit. Therefore, the leader would have to communicate this information to the hospital staff so that they can have the least number of medical errors, or none at all. This would make the hospital the priority destination for patients looking for healthcare services.

Managers working in the disseminator capacity have to communicate relevant and useful information to subordinates and team members. When communicating to these individuals, it is vital to invite ideas, views and feedback from each employee and maintain an

open communication channel (Powell et al., 2022). This approach ensures that every employee feels valued and appreciated by the organization. Following the veteran's death, the manager had to communicate to other employees and ensure that they understand the consequences of medication errors. This would then be followed by an invitation to the employees to give their input on what could be the reason behind the medical errors, and what can be done to ensure that the number of errors is reduced. After implementing some of their suggestions, it would be prudent to invite feedback from them to determine how well the interventions are working.

The final informational role is that of a spokesperson. In this capacity, the manager has to communicate important information about the organization to external stakeholders. This communication could be to address government policies, deal with suppliers, or for PR purposes (Powell et al., 2022). This role requires that the manager has a clear picture of the organization's brand image. Having a reputation as a hospital with a high rate of medical errors is detrimental to the hospital's brand. Therefore, it is crucial for the manager to make an effort to help the organization establish and maintain a positive brand image as a hospital whereby patients are in safe hands. By enhancing such a reputation, the manager can comfortably excel in their role as a spokesperson.

The decisional cluster of managerial roles includes the following roles: entrepreneur, disturbance-handler, resource-allocator, and negotiator (Bezar et al., 2023). Managers serving as entrepreneurs should be ready to take initiative. This means that they should be ready to initiate projects and concerns with effective problem-solving skills. On this front, managers need to connect with their teams, and this can be achieved through team-building activities and icebreakers. After the unfortunate incident of the veteran's death, it would have been helpful to assemble the team and engage them in team building activities whereby they can help each other differentiate between drugs that they are likely to confuse. They could also share tips with each other on how to avoid medication errors. Additionally, they can also establish meaningful relationships amongst themselves that will promote their ability to work together when handling

patients. When two or people attend to the same patient and maintain open communication channels, the chances of making errors re reduced because one team member can spot an error made by a colleague and they can address it before it manifests into an adversity.

The role of a disturbance handler requires being in a position to ensure that everything runs smoothly (Dandalt, 2021). Some of the responsibilities under this role include identifying improvement areas, addressing gaps in teamwork, and using mentoring sessions to resolve conflicts. Following the fatal medical error, there was unrest and uncertainty, especially concerning the staff member(s) responsible for the error. As a leader, the manager had to have a session with those responsible and talk to them about the importance of avoiding errors when dealing with people's lives. At this point, it was evident that there was a need for improvement with how patients were handled, particularly involving medical errors. It was up to the manager to ensure that they find out what caused the error, and work to provide measures and interventions to ensure that it never happens again.

The managerial capacity as a resource allocator requires one to allocate funds, cut costs, and distribute resources across the organization (Bezar et al., 2023). This role requires critical evaluation to ensure that the resources are allocated appropriately depending on how they are needed. Such resources include human resources, materials, and funding. Taking the case study as an example, it is quite likely that the error arose due to miscommunication or being misinformed about the correct drug to administer in that scenario. One possible intervention to address the problem would be to offer additional training to help the staff become more familiar with the drugs to allow them differentiate easily. Training programs would require the institution to spend some money, and it is up to the manager to recognize this as a necessary intervention and allocate the needed resources to ensure that the training program is implemented successfully to reduce the likelihood of making such errors in the future.

Finally, managers can also serve as negotiators. It is well-known that a successful negotiation is one that results in a win-win outcome. Managers often find themselves in

positions where they have to negotiate with other stakeholders or team members to reach outcomes that are favourable for both parties (Dandalt, 2021). The role is distinct because the manager has to consider what is in their team's best interests. After the incident in the case study, it is likely that the hospital considered terminating their employment because of the negative publicity it got as a result of their actions. As a manager, intervening in this case and determining what really happened, and seeking a chance for the staff to redeem themselves, especially if they are highly-skilled and considered an important asset to the institution.

Based on these roles provided by Mintzberg, managers can assess their strengths and weaknesses. This assessment is a good starting point for one to improve their managerial duties with experience and practice. This would also provide an avenue for the manager to put these skills into use and develop into an effective and good manager while creating room for career advancement.

Leadership Traits – OCEAN Model of Personality

When defining an ideal leader, traits that are often mentioned include intelligence, determination, vision, and toughness. These traits have traditionally been linked to good leadership and are quite necessary. However, they are insufficient qualities for the leader. Leaders also need other qualities, often considered softer and personal qualities. According to studies, there are certain personality traits that can effectively differentiate between adequate performers and outstanding ones. The OCEAN model of personality is a useful tool when it comes to assessing a leader's personality and leadership traits in any situation (Bandera and Passerini, 2020). ⁶ The five dimensions under the ocean model are openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism.

²⁵ Openness to experience deals with curiosity, innovative thinking, being open to new experiences, and assimilating new information (Russo and Stol, 2020). Leaders that are considered higher in this category are often imaginative, curious, and broad-minded. They are also gig picture thinkers and are also more strategic. Research suggests that openness to

experience is an essential leadership component that is especially critical at higher organizational levels. Leaders that score highly here are more strategic when it comes to problem-solving, and this can be helpful to managers looking to stay ahead of market trends, new products, competitive threats, and regulatory changes.

Conscientiousness deals with behaviours revolving around how people approach work (Meixner and Pospisil, 2021). Leaders with higher scores in this area tend to be earnest and organized. They rarely get into trouble and always take their commitments seriously. On the other hand, those with lower scores are more creative, spontaneous, open to bending ¹rules and are rarely concerned about following through with commitments. Research shows that those with higher scores are more likely to be effective leaders than their counterparts with lower scores. However, some scholars argue that conscientiousness is more connected to management than leadership. Additionally, higher scores are associated with better preparedness, organization, goal orientation and structure preference. However, higher scores are also associated with risk aversiveness, lack of creativity, and tendency to dislike change. Some may also describe such individuals as being boring. Therefore, conscientiousness is critical at lower company levels, such as a secretary who never makes mistakes when taking messages.

¹Extraversion deals with behaviours that are more likely to manifest in group settings and are generally aimed at getting ahead in life. Such behaviours often become apparent when one is trying to control or influence others (Danndanavar et al., 2021). Leaders that have high scores in this area are viewed as competitive, self-confident, opinionated, and outspoken. In contrast, those with lower scores have relatively low to no interest in influencing others or working with them. They also prefer working alone. Generally, leaders often score higher in extraversion than non-leaders because they can influence groups due to their competitiveness, self-confidence, and decisiveness. These qualities also allow them to build better teams and get results. However, there is a question as to whether these qualities are exhibited to facilitated self-

aggrandizement or tea performance. To put this into context, there are some leaders that demonstrate such qualities solely because they would like to get elected or promoted. They also like being the centre of attention and promptly switch from one idea or conversation to another. Such leaders are also more likely to over-estimate their capabilities.

Agreeableness as a dimension of personality deals with how one gets along with others, rather than getting ahead of them (Nguyen and Le, 2023). People with a high score in agreeableness come across as emphatic, warm, diplomatic, approachable, optimistic, and charming. On the other hand, people that have low scores in this area may appear moody, cold, somewhat pessimistic, insensitive, and socially clueless. This trait is significantly associated with an individual's need for approval. Even though those with higher scores can be better at building teams and are often well-liked, they may often struggle to get results through others. This is because most of them value relationships over performance, resulting in them facing difficulties when dealing with conflicts, managing performance, or making unpopular decisions. These scenarios can adversely affect the effectiveness of their teams, which weighs negatively on their effectiveness as leaders.

Neuroticism is a sector that deals with how people respond to stress, personal criticism, change, or failure. Leaders with low scores in this area appear optimistic, calm, thick skinned, rarely show their emotions and do not take failures or mistakes personally. On the other hand, those with higher neuroticism scores are moody, thin-skinned, anxious, passionate, and tend to lose their cool when facing criticism or stressful situations. Leaders often have an influence on their followers, therefore, leaders who are thick-skinned and clam under pressure can help their team work through challenges and remain focused on the task at hand. Differences in neuroticism may not manifest in routine situations that can be predictable. However, these differences can readily be observed during crises or times of uncertainty (Mishra et al., 2022). Those with lower scores will remain calm, cool, and collected under duress, while those with higher scores may become tense, emotional, or nervous.

The operational definition of neuroticism is done by terms referring to anger, worry, hostility, vulnerability, self-consciousness, irritability, sadness, and irritability. Various factor analyses have shown significant correlations between these factors. Leaders with low scores in neuroticism are very flat to extent that they cannot express any passion or enthusiasm. In contrast, charismatic leaders often have higher neuroticism scores.

Group and Team

Regardless of how good of a leader one is, the successful implementation of any change requires leaders to treat their subordinates as a team, as opposed to treating them as a group. A group refers to a collection of people that work, interact and cooperate with each other to achieve a common goal within a specified period (Surbhi, 2023). Each group member has an individual identity and they share resources and information with each other. In organisations, groups are formed based on common interests, beliefs, and experience in common fields and principles. These factors are considered when forming groups to ensure easy coordination within the groups. Two types of groups exist: formal and informal groups. Formal groups are formed by management to perform specific tasks, while informal groups are formed naturally within an institution to satisfy psychological or social human needs. Examples of groups include trade unions, ethnic groups, and friendship circles.

A team is a collection of people that come together to achieve a common goal within a specified timeframe while having collective accountability. For teams, the main agenda is one for all and all for one. Unlike groups that only share information and resources, members of a team collectively share the responsibility for any tasks assigned to the team (Surbhi, 2023). This means that the team is always accountable for the outcomes because they result from the collective efforts of team members. Team members usually have a mutual understanding with each other and their collective efforts minimize their weaknesses and maximize their strengths because they complement each other. Synergy is the important feature of any team, indicating that the team can achieve much more than what each member can achieve individually. The

proper functioning of teams requires three key features: cohesion, confrontation, and collaboration. Examples of teams include a management team and a team of doctors.

When making transformations in a healthcare setting, using a team would be much more effective than using a group. First, a group can only have one leader, while teams can have more than one leader. Having more leaders allows for brainstorming and looking at the situation from different perspectives. This usually leads to the selection of the most suitable intervention based on merit and without bias. Members of a group focus on achieving individual goals, while team members focus on achieving team goals. Making a change such as reducing the rate of medication errors is a team effort and requires everyone to work together and take collective responsibility, rather than blaming individuals for any mistakes. Finally, a team would be more suitable for the task because team members are interdependent, unlike group members who work independently.

Recommendation

When a patient dies in the custody of healthcare providers, questions are always raised about how fit the healthcare provider is to take care of patients. The situation is worse when the death occurs as a result of a medical error, as was the case in the case study. Given the magnitude of the problem, it is essential to come up with interventions that can help eliminate the problem and re-establish the hospital's brand in a positive way. Based on the information collected, the most suitable approach would be to use a team approach to handling the problem.

The team approach is suitable for handling medication errors because it provides a platform for all team members to work toward the common goal of minimizing or eliminating medication errors. When working as a team, each member is committed to ensuring that the required outcome is achieved, while also being ready to take responsibility in case anything goes wrong. This means that in the event that a medication error occurs at the hospital, every team member would take responsibility for the error, rather than pinning the blame on an

individual. This approach encourages all team members to put in their efforts to ensure that they do not develop a negative reputation. As a result, all members would work together to ensure that all procedures are completed as required without any unnecessary errors.

The team approach also gives room for more than one individual to take up leadership roles. It is evident that people have different leadership styles and qualities that would make them ideal leaders in different scenarios. Thus, utilizing a team approach would allow different leaders to use their skills differently in different situations. For example, immediately following the incident, tensions would have been high. In this scenario, a person that can stay calm and collected would have been suitable for the leadership role to help the team remain focused and clam when facing adversities. When difficult decisions need to be made, such as releasing incompetent staff members, then a different leader could take up this responsibility.

After leaders have established what type of leaders they are, they can discuss amongst themselves and decide when each leader would be suitable for a particular scenario. During all these discussions, it is critical to ensure that the leaders employ a democratic approach. This approach is more suitable for teams because it allows team members are involved in the decision-making process. For example, the leader would collect information from team members concerning the possible causes of medication errors in the hospital. After collecting this information, the team members could then provide suggestions on how best to minimize the occurrence of these errors. This approach would be more fruitful because the team members are the ones that deal with patients and they have experienced the situations first-hand and can provide practical information. In contrast to autocratic leadership whereby the leader makes all the decisions, a democratic leadership approach is bound to yield better results because the team members will feel involved in the decision-making process, which makes them more likely to cooperate to ensuring that the team objective is achieved.

Conclusion

This report highlights the role of leaders in introducing and pushing for transformational changes in the healthcare industry. The report used the case of a veteran that died due to medical errors that saw healthcare staff administer the wrong medicine. The aftermath of the incident was that the federal government suffered a significant loss during an out-of-court settlement that cost a lot of money. The hospital's reputation also took a negative hit that made patients reluctant to use its services because they were no longer sure that they were in safe hands. As such, it became necessary for the hospital's management to intervene and introduce measures that would help reduce incidents of medication errors.

Throughout the change process, it is evident that leaders have significant roles to play at different stages. Most importantly, managers can take up different roles as required to ensure that the organization's operations run smoothly. However, it is important for people in leadership positions to understand their leadership styles, which means that they have a good understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. Once they understand these aspects, they can determine the situations in which their skills would be relevant, and in those where their weaknesses manifest strongly, they can delegate these tasks to other leaders with more suitable leadership traits for that situation.

Finally, the report highlighted the importance of using a team approach as opposed to a group approach. The key takeaway is that team members work interdependently towards the team objective while taking collective responsibility for the team's outcomes. In contrast, group members work independently and are only responsible for meeting their assigned targets, resulting in individuals taking responsibility for whatever was assigned to them.

Reflection

This exercise has been very educative and informative. I have learned about leadership in healthcare settings and the roles that these leaders have to play in different scenarios. I have also learned about different leadership traits and characteristics, and how each of them can make a leader perfect for some situations and unfit for other situations. Based on this newly

acquired knowledge, I can assess myself to determine what kind of leader I would be, if at all I have the qualities required for leadership. I have also learned about the differences between teams and groups, and how teams are better-suited for a healthcare environment than groups. Moving forward, I hope to be part of a team, rather than a group, and I hope that our team leader will be democratic and allow us to participate in decision-making.

The learning outcomes outlined for this research have been useful in guiding me throughout the writing process. ²² I was able to gain a better understanding of the key concepts in health leadership, such as governance and health systems, and how they are related. I demonstrated how leaders can influence different areas of the health system by looking at the different roles that they can play at different capacities. Systems thinking, which is achieved through teams, is also essential in improving health outcomes in a healthcare setting.

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FINAL GRADE

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GENERAL COMMENTS

Engagement with Literature Skills (4/15)

Marginal presentation with informative structure, headings, and sub-headings. No tables or figures have been included. ARU Harvard style could have been applied more appropriately. Make sure that you learn more about this Style. Such details can be found in University Study Skills Plus page. SID number is included.

Knowledge and Understanding Skills (9/25)

The problem been not been formulated using appropriate evidence used from international publications and statistics. The problem causes and implications for health/social care have not been discussed using experience and literature. No applications of theories or concepts. The role of leadership in the creation/magnifying the problem has not been discussed. The choice of relying on quotes did not help at all. You need to show your understanding and demonstrate your ability to identify and argue problems in order to develop and lead teams to find solutions.

Cognitive and Intellectual Skills (12/25)

The case study (i.e. organisation) has not been identified. The implications on the organisation have not been identified. The problem has not been identified and evidenced appropriately. Leadership and its implications on the magnifying the problem has been briefly introduced and could have been made stronger with application of relevant evidence and concepts (e.g. MisLeadership, behaviour theory).

Practical Application Skills (0/20)

No strategy has been developed.

Transferable Skills for Life and Professional Practice (10/15)

You did not reflect on your learning and engagement in the activities so that you can extract lessons to support your professional and personal development. This module is about developing your leadership so you need to demonstrate your learning and ability in this sense.

Overall, this is very weak submission that does not meet the learning outcomes. I am very disappointed with this quality. Students were given too many opportunities to discuss their concerns and issues with me via Zoom/Teams meeting/ telephone/Drop in sessions/Moodle Discussion boards, etc. but it does not seem that you have taken any of them. This is not acceptable as you are setting yourself to fail and I hope you will address this urgently not just in your resubmission but also in your next modules.

Marked by F Khan

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