

The Development of a Novel Polypharmacy Review Referral Service in NHS Lanarkshire: An Innovative Approach to Seamless Care

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Introduction

The World Health Organisation recognises polypharmacy as one of the leading causes of avoidable harm to patients [1]. The 2023 iSYMPATHY report highlighted the advantages of conducting polypharmacy reviews using the 7-step approach [2], however, the acute care setting is not always a conducive environment for a comprehensive medication review, particularly for patients with short hospital stays. A novel referral pathway was developed to allow hospital pharmacists to refer patients directly to primary care pharmacists for a polypharmacy review on discharge from hospital.

Aims

To develop and evaluate the introduction of a novel referral pathway by quantifying the number of referrals made and the type of interventions made during review.

Methods

A referral pathway was developed by senior hospital and primary care pharmacists (Figure 1). Patients met inclusion criteria if they were prescribed five or more medicines, received high-risk medicines, or had a history of recurrent falls. Patients receiving palliative care were excluded. The pathway was initially trialled for four months in the acute frailty and medical receiving wards. Data collected included primary care locality, review status, and review outcomes such as medication changes, medicines stopped, and onward referrals. Outcomes were analysed to identify common themes and inform pathway refinement, followed by a further four-month data collection period. After review, the pathway was rolled out to all wards at UHH, excluding the cardiac catheterisation lab. Inclusion criteria were expanded to include patients discharged to interim social care facilities, while new care home residents were excluded to avoid duplication. The project was approved by service leads and NHS Lanarkshire's Caldicott Guardian.

Figure 1: Referral Pathway

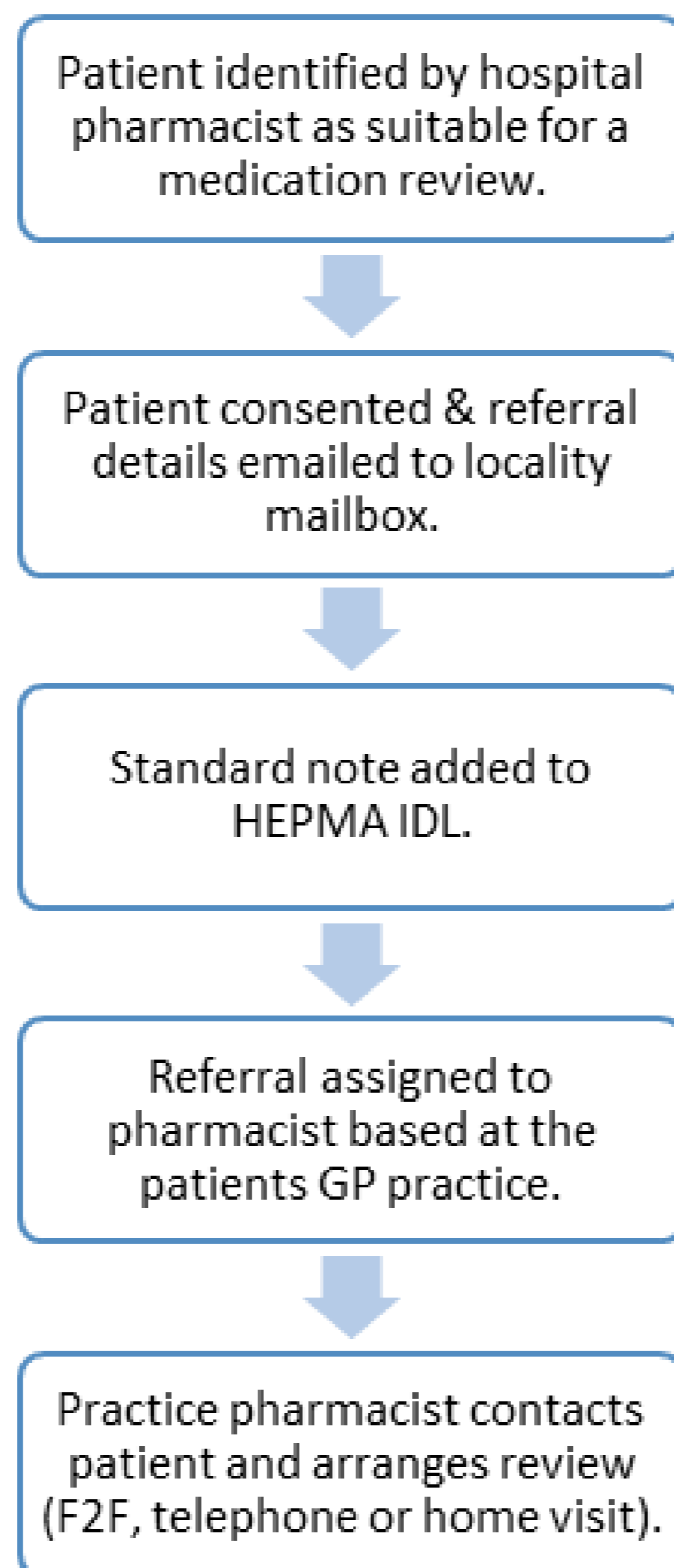
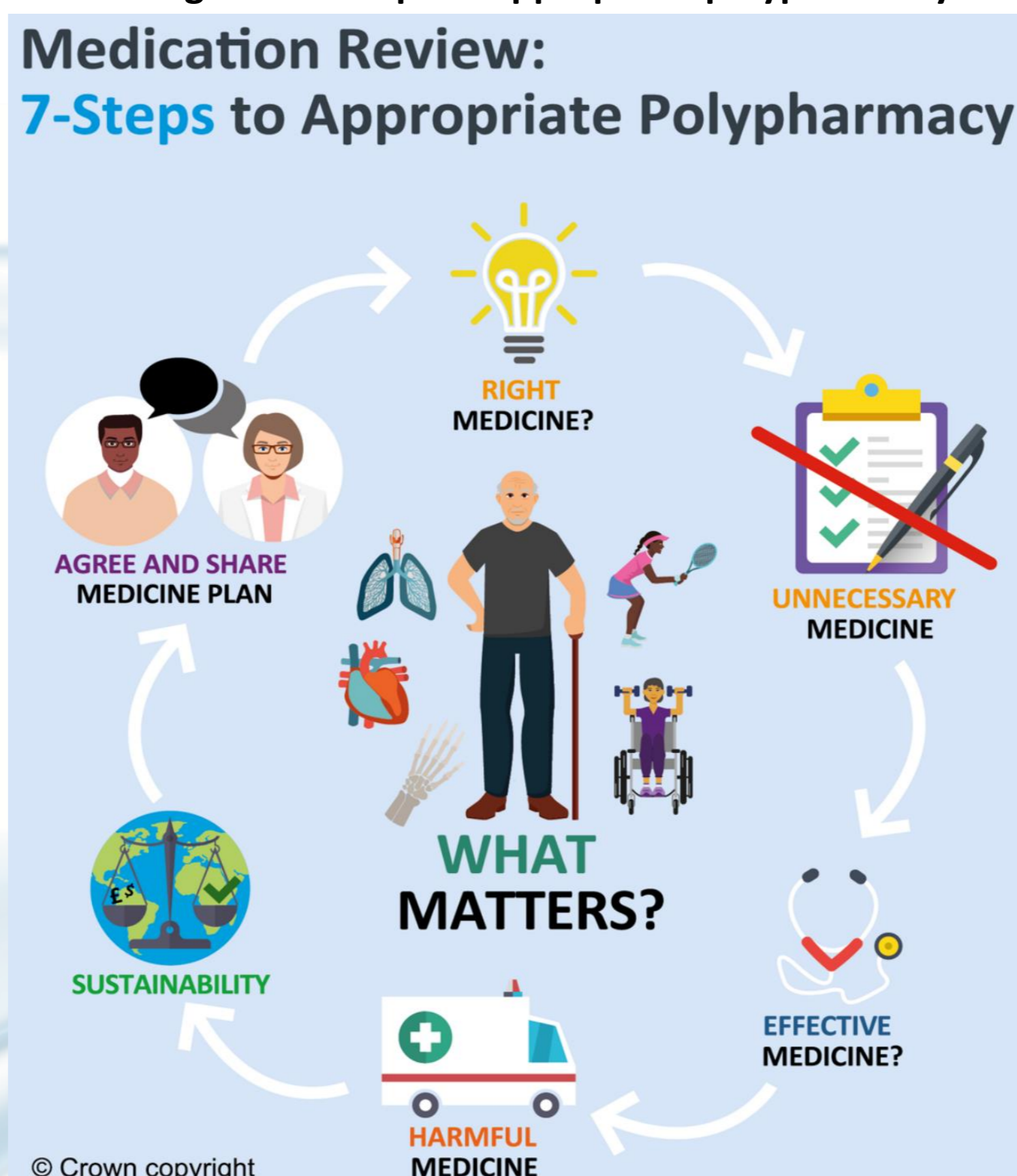


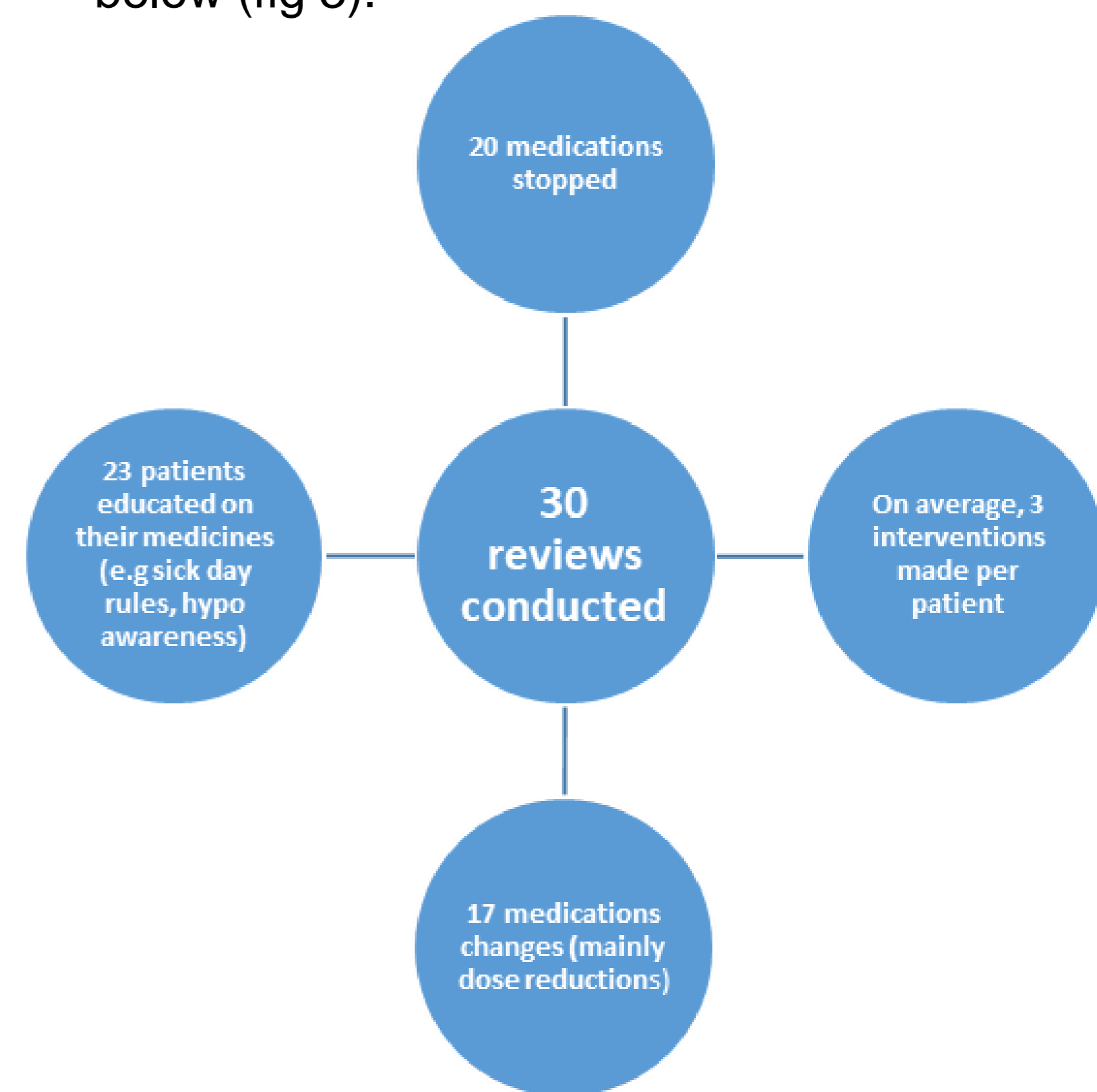
Figure 2: 7 steps to appropriate polypharmacy



Results

In total, 60 referrals were made, with 30 medication reviews completed. Seventeen reviews were not completed due to: lost to follow up, declined review, or review by another healthcare professional. Thirteen reviews were still outstanding at the end of the 8 months.

Outcomes for these 7 patients are detailed below (fig 3).



Conclusion

This service development project has highlighted the advantages of establishing a novel referral pathway between secondary and primary care pharmacists. Initial evaluation suggests the pathway has the potential to reduce unnecessary medications, while also empowering patients through education on their medicines, and optimal management. Next steps involve introducing the referral pathway to the other acute hospital sites within NHS Lanarkshire.

References

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