

Lay summary for **Developing consensus on hospital prescribing indicators of potential harms amenable to decision support.**

Thomas SK, McDowell SE, Hodson J, Nwulu U, Howard RL, Avery AJ, Slee A, Coleman J. Developing consensus on hospital prescribing indicators of potential harms amenable to decision support. *Br J Clin Pharmacol*, 2013 Nov, 76(5):797-809.

Prescription errors made in hospitals can cause unnecessary inconvenience, illnesses and deaths. Monitoring the types, frequency and severity of these errors is crucial to preventing such errors. 'Prescribing indicators' - viewable effects of prescription errors – are generally seen by medical professionals as a sound way to record, measure and help stop errors being made. However, prescribing indicators are rarely very exact, and they point more to matters of quality rather than safety. A standard opinion on the importance of different prescription errors does not exist. Therefore, as yet, there is no validated list of important prescribing errors to help prescribers in hospitals to work more safely. This study aimed to provide such a list.

We carried out two rounds of surveys of hospital pharmacists and doctors, who reported severe and/or highly frequent prescribing errors from both paper-based and electronic prescription systems. In the first round of the survey, participants identified 210 prescribing indicators. For the second round of the survey, the full list of reported indicators was returned to study participants in the hope of creating a more focused list. This second round produced a new and smaller list of 89 prescribing indicators, but with an additional 71 new indicators being suggested by our participants. The authors of the study then selected 20 of those new indicators for inclusion in the revised list, which brought the list total to 109. Of the prescribing errors that our survey had now identified, 80 of the 109 were assessed to be of high or extreme risk when the scores for likelihood and severity were considered.

Compiling and standardising prescribing indicators can be a very useful tool for understanding and preventing prescription errors in hospitals. It is hoped that our new validated list of important prescription indicators will help to refine and tailor the alerts issued in ePrescribing systems with Clinical Decision Support (CDS), and so help hospital doctors and pharmacists to prescribe more safely for patients.