



FOR REGISTERED NURSE MEMBERS AT
WEST HILLS HOSPITAL & MEDICAL CENTER

Med Cart Mayhem? Not Really.

On Jan. 26, Director of Nursing Janet Brooks informed all RNs that we are not to eat or drink from our "med" carts. What? Really? How harsh.

To point out the obvious, we do need water and sometimes food on our cart in order to give medicine to some patients. At times, pills must be crushed and mixed in water, applesauce, or some type of food or liquid to get the patients to take them. If we can't carry any water or food on the cart, how are we to give meds to patients with water and/or food? We can't leave the cart unattended and we can't put anything on the cart? Something's gotta give.

We use these carts all day, every day and we know the hazards of our med carts. However, we're not so sure that management knows the facts about them.

Med Cart Facts

- The bottom drawers of the carts – where syringes, alcohol swabs and monitor patches are kept – have NEVER locked properly. If we do manage to get one locked, we then have to call engineering and hope that someone knows how to fix it.
- The platform to mix medications is on top of the drawers with a reservoir around its entirety. The locking mechanism is at the very bottom of the cart, so if we do have an accidental spill, it's highly unlikely to reach and damage the locking mechanism.
- RNs were NEVER asked to evaluate the appropriateness of the carts before they were purchased and put into use. We have tried, to different degrees of success, to make the carts work even though they are far from ideal.
- Why did the hospital purchase carts for which the warranty on repairs would be voided if water or food was carried on them? Water and food such as applesauce must be available to mix with medications for some patients.

What's the solution here? We're not sure. But here are some suggestions that would improve the situation:

- Staff units adequately so that all RNs receive their breaks and lunch. This way we can quench our thirst without having to carry a water or coffee on our cart. We have never seen anyone eat from med carts -- period -- so it's not an issue.
- Next time the hospital wants to purchase med carts, have some bedside RNs in the appropriate units evaluate them first and put them into practice for a few days to see if they're ideal for our purposes.
- How about *asking* RNs what's really going on?

"Who wants to put their food on a med cart? We often have to crush pills and mix them with water or applesauce so a patient can take them. I wouldn't want to ingest any of that stuff. But we're between a rock and a hard place being told we can't have water or food on the cart. Where are we supposed to mix the meds for patients?"

Linda Perrin, RN, Union Steward

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