PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES

Policies and procedures vary with each facility. Generalized information will be discussed in this handout.

1. When signing out controlled substances, the following information should be included:
   - patient’s name
   - room number
   - doctor’s name
   - time given
   - amount remaining in the narcotic box
   - your signature and title

   Some hospitals require the patient’s identification number.

2. Ongoing counts are done each time a controlled substance is removed. If an error is found, an immediate search is conducted. When counts are incorrect, the charge nurse must be notified immediately. Recounts may be done. Counts should be done by the departing and incoming nurse each shift change. Both nurses must sign the count sheet verifying that all counts were correct. If the shift counts are not correct, the incoming nurse should not sign the sheet until the incorrect count is rectified. The responsibility for correct count lies with the departing nurse. Charts must be checked against the sign-out sheet to find the missing dose(s). If nothing can be identified, an incident report must be completed. Should this occur with any frequency, the drug enforcement agency may come to call.

3. Should a controlled substance need to be discarded (wasted); two licensed nurses must perform the action. The patient’s name, room number, and signature and title of each nurse must be entered on the “waste sheet”. If the controlled substance is wasted in order to achieve a correct dosage, it is not noted on the nurse’s notes. If the controlled substance is wasted due to patient refusal or any other reason, it is charted on the nurse’s notes. If there is not waste sheet, it is charted on the nurse’s notes and requires the signature of both nurses.

4. Controlled substances have side effects that could create medical situation that range from moderate to severe, such as respiratory depression. The more common side effects include nausea and vomiting. It is a common practice to give anti-emetic agents with narcotics. This often prevent the ill effects of the narcotic. There are also agents that potentiate the effects of the controlled substance, i.e., make a routine dose much more powerful and effective. Innovar is an example of this type of agent. It is often given for surgical/examination procedures. It is extremely important to check the patient’s chart before giving narcotics.