

**Institute for Safe Medication Practices**  
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[www.ismp.org](http://www.ismp.org)

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**ISMP Releases Final Guidelines for  
Timely Administration of Scheduled Medications**

**Horsham, Pa---**The Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) has finalized a guidance document on the controversial “30-minute rule” for medication administration in acute care. The rule appears as a requirement in the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Conditions of Participation Interpretive Guidelines, and calls for medications to be administered within 30 minutes before or after their scheduled time. ISMP’s guidelines for healthcare organizations implementing the rule has been posted at: [www.ismp.org/tools/guidelines/acute-care/tasm.pdf](http://www.ismp.org/tools/guidelines/acute-care/tasm.pdf)

The ISMP Acute Care Guidelines for Timely Administration of Scheduled Medications were developed with input from a multidisciplinary group of advisors, and aim to give healthcare organizations the flexibility to establish more realistic and safer goals associated with timely medication administration while still allowing nurses to utilize their critical thinking skills to manage their time wisely and prioritize patient needs.

The impetus for ISMP’s guidelines comes from a survey of nurse practitioners on the 30-minute rule the Institute conducted in late 2010, which received more than 18,000 responses.

Respondents made it clear that changes to drug delivery methods and gradual increases in the complexity of care, number of prescribed medications per patient, and number of patients assigned to each nurse have made the long-standing rule error prone. Many nurses reported feeling great pressure to take shortcuts to comply, which has led to harmful errors.

The ISMP guidelines provide recommendations on time-critical and non-time critical scheduled medications, first doses, and medical approval. They also offer advice on specific operational issues such as use of automated dispensing cabinets, medication administration record (MAR) documentation, and event reporting.

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ISMP encourages hospitals to evaluate their goals for timely medication administration using the new guidelines, which have been thoroughly vetted by many medication and patient safety experts; hospital safety teams; professional nursing, pharmacy, and respiratory therapy organizations; The Joint Commission; pharmacists; and frontline nurses who bear the ultimate responsibility for administering medications in a timely manner.

Using a modified failure mode and effects analysis process, ISMP has taken steps to anticipate any unintended consequences of changing the goals for timely medication administration.

However, any change carries the risk of introducing new, unrecognized sources of errors. Thus, we are asking acute care facilities that make changes to their policies based on these guidelines to report any associated concerns, hazards, errors, or adverse events to the ISMP Medication Errors Reporting Program ([www.ismp.org/merp](http://www.ismp.org/merp)).

Hospitals are still being held accountable for the 30 minute rule in the CMS Interpretive Guidelines. However, ISMP is optimistic that positive changes will be made to the rule in the future, given the wide support for more reasonable and clinically appropriate guidelines.

For an *ISMP Medication Safety Alert!* article with more information on the new guidelines, go to: [www.ismp.org/Newsletters/acutecare/articles/20110519\\_2.asp](http://www.ismp.org/Newsletters/acutecare/articles/20110519_2.asp). For an ISMP news release on its survey regarding the 30-minute rule, visit: <http://www.ismp.org/pressroom/PR20100909.pdf>

**About ISMP:** The Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) is an independent, nonprofit charitable organization that works closely with healthcare practitioners and institutions, regulatory agencies, consumers, and professional organizations to provide education about medication errors and their prevention. ISMP represents more than 35 years of experience in helping healthcare practitioners keep patients safe, and continues to lead efforts to improve the medication use process. ISMP is a federally certified patient safety organization (PSO), providing healthcare practitioners and organizations with the highest level of legal protection and confidentiality for patient safety data and error reports they submit to the Institute. For more information on ISMP, or its medication safety alert newsletters and other tools for healthcare professionals and consumers, visit [www.ismp.org](http://www.ismp.org).

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