

Reducing medical errors for older veterans through communication, mediation and quality assurance

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Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of integrated strategies—communication protocols, mediation techniques, and quality assurance (QA) measures—in reducing medical errors among older veterans within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). The research seeks to identify key factors contributing to errors and assess the impact of targeted interventions on enhancing patient safety. A mixed-methods research design was employed, combining qualitative interviews with healthcare providers, veterans, and caregivers, alongside quantitative analysis of medical records, incident reports, and patient safety surveys. The study utilized stratified sampling to ensure diversity across different VHA facilities and applied statistical techniques, including chi-square tests, logistic regression, and bootstrapping, to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions. The findings indicate a significant reduction in medical errors through the implementation of standardized communication protocols, particularly during patient handoffs. Mediation effectively resolved conflicts arising from errors, fostering a culture of transparency and continuous improvement. Facilities with robust QA programs demonstrated higher success rates in identifying and mitigating potential risks. The integration of these strategies led to a 45% reduction in overall error rates, with communication errors showing the most substantial decline. The study highlights the critical role of communication, mediation, and QA in enhancing patient safety within veterans' healthcare. While the results demonstrate the effectiveness of these strategies, challenges such as resource variability and the need for ongoing training persist. The research underscores the importance of adopting a multi-faceted approach to error reduction and suggests further exploration of advanced technologies and longitudinal studies to assess the sustainability of these interventions.

Keywords: Medical errors; Veterans; Communication protocols; Mediation; Quality assurance; Patient safety

1. Introduction

Medical errors remain a significant concern in healthcare systems worldwide, contributing to patient harm, increased healthcare costs, and diminished trust in healthcare providers. Among vulnerable populations, such as older veterans, the impact of medical errors can be particularly severe due to the complex and multifaceted nature of their healthcare needs. Veterans often present with service-related injuries, chronic conditions, and polypharmacy, all of which heighten the risk of adverse events. Ensuring their safety requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the unique challenges faced by this population within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA).

In recent years, the healthcare community has recognized the critical role of effective communication, mediation, and quality assurance (QA) in preventing medical errors. Communication breakdowns during patient handoffs and transitions of care are among the leading causes of preventable errors, as they often result in incomplete or inaccurate

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information transfer. Similarly, unresolved conflicts and misunderstandings between patients and healthcare providers can exacerbate the consequences of errors, eroding trust and hindering recovery. Quality assurance measures, including regular audits and incident reporting systems, are essential for identifying potential risks and ensuring that best practices are consistently followed.

Despite the growing awareness of these issues, there remains a lack of comprehensive studies that explore the combined impact of communication protocols, mediation techniques, and QA measures on reducing medical errors in the veteran population. This study seeks to fill that gap by evaluating the effectiveness of these integrated strategies within the VHA, with the aim of providing actionable insights for healthcare providers and policymakers.

By examining the interplay between these interventions, this research will not only contribute to the existing body of knowledge but also offer practical recommendations for enhancing patient safety in veterans' healthcare settings. The findings of this study are expected to have broad implications, potentially informing policy decisions and guiding the development of targeted interventions that can be applied in other healthcare systems facing similar challenges.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Frameworks in Understanding Medical Errors

Medical errors have been extensively studied through various theoretical lenses. Reason's Swiss Cheese Model is one of the most prevalent frameworks, emphasizing that errors result from the alignment of multiple latent failures within an organization's defenses, rather than a single mistake (Reason, 1990). In the context of older veterans, this model helps in understanding how vulnerabilities at different stages—such as communication breakdowns or procedural mishaps—can align to cause significant harm. Health Communication Theory also provides valuable insights, particularly the idea that effective communication is foundational to patient safety, as it influences how information is transmitted and understood across the healthcare continuum (Street et al., 2009). By applying these theories, the literature underscores the complex, multi-faceted nature of medical errors and the critical role of systemic approaches to mitigate them.

2.2. Overview of Medical Errors in Older Populations

Medical errors represent a critical concern in the healthcare of older adults, exacerbated by age-related physiological changes. Aging impacts vital organ functions, such as the liver and kidneys, which are crucial for drug metabolism and excretion, thereby increasing the susceptibility to adverse drug reactions and medication errors (Anderson & Webster, 2021). Additionally, the management of polypharmacy is a significant challenge, often leading to drug interactions and dosing inaccuracies (Smith et al., 2022). Cognitive decline, which impairs memory, attention, and decision-making, further complicates adherence to treatment regimens and the comprehension of medical instructions, increasing the likelihood of errors (Lee & Johnson, 2023). Multiple chronic conditions further complicate diagnosis and treatment, resulting in higher risks of procedural and diagnostic errors (Brown et al., 2022). For older veterans, these risks are amplified due to the additional complexity introduced by service-related health conditions (Miller & Adams, 2023).

2.3. Medical Errors in Veterans' Healthcare

Veterans' healthcare is characterized by unique challenges that contribute to a higher incidence of medical errors. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) serves a diverse population with complex health needs, including service-related injuries and age-related conditions. The large network of VHA facilities can lead to inconsistencies in care delivery and communication among providers (Jones & Williams, 2022). These inconsistencies often result in misdiagnoses, inappropriate treatments, and procedural errors (Wilson et al., 2023). Moreover, the VHA system struggles with issues like long wait times and variability in care quality, which further elevate the risk of medical errors (Taylor et al., 2023). While individual studies have documented these challenges, there is a lack of comprehensive research focusing on how communication, mediation, and quality assurance strategies can be integrated to address these specific vulnerabilities in veterans' healthcare settings.

2.4. Communication in Healthcare Settings

Effective communication is crucial for reducing medical errors and ensuring high-quality care. The use of standardized communication tools, such as the SBAR (Situation-Background-Assessment-Recommendation) protocol, has been shown to enhance the clarity and consistency of information transfer, particularly during handoffs or transitions of care (Harrison & Smith, 2022). The integration of Electronic Health Records (EHRs) into clinical workflows is also vital, as it centralizes patient information, which can significantly improve coordination among healthcare providers (Lee & Jackson, 2023). However, the effectiveness of these tools depends on their proper implementation and consistent use.

Patient-centered communication, which involves actively engaging patients and their families in care decisions, is another critical factor that has been shown to improve adherence to treatment plans and reduce errors (Green et al., 2023). Despite these advancements, there is still a gap in understanding how these communication strategies can be tailored specifically to address the unique needs of older veterans in preventing medical errors.

2.5. Mediation as a Strategy for Error Reduction

Mediation is increasingly recognized as a vital strategy for resolving conflicts and misunderstandings related to medical errors. This approach involves a neutral third party who facilitates discussions between the involved parties to reach a mutually agreeable resolution, particularly in disputes between healthcare providers and patients or their families (Martinez & Thompson, 2022). Research has shown that mediation can foster a culture of transparency and accountability, transforming errors into opportunities for learning and improvement (Nguyen & Park, 2023). In the context of veterans' healthcare, mediation has the potential to rebuild trust between patients and providers, reduce the incidence of formal complaints, and prevent legal actions (Kim & Lee, 2022). However, the existing literature has yet to thoroughly explore how mediation, combined with other strategies like communication enhancement and quality assurance, can holistically reduce medical errors in this specific population.

2.6. Quality Assurance and Patient Safety

Quality Assurance (QA) is a systematic approach to improving healthcare safety by monitoring, evaluating, and refining clinical processes and outcomes (Evans & Carter, 2022). Incident reporting systems, which capture and analyze errors, are crucial components of QA, as they provide valuable data for identifying areas of improvement (Foster & Allen, 2023). Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) programs focus on implementing evidence-based practices and corrective actions to enhance care quality (Foster & Allen, 2023). Regular audits and training sessions for healthcare providers are essential to ensuring adherence to clinical guidelines and maintaining high standards of care (Young & Harper, 2023). Despite the demonstrated effectiveness of these measures in reducing procedural errors and improving patient safety, there is a need for research that specifically examines how QA initiatives can be optimized and tailored to the needs of older veterans within the VHA system.

2.7. Research Gap

While existing literature provides a substantial foundation on medical errors, communication strategies, mediation, and quality assurance, there is a notable gap in comprehensive research that integrates these elements specifically for older veterans in the VHA system. This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring how communication failures, mediation strategies, and quality assurance measures can be combined to effectively reduce medical errors among older veterans. The research will also address the unique healthcare challenges faced by this population, aiming to offer practical recommendations for enhancing patient safety and care quality in veterans' healthcare settings.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Objectives and Hypotheses

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of communication, mediation, and quality assurance strategies in reducing medical errors among older veterans within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). The study also aims to identify the specific types of errors most prevalent in this population and to assess the impact of diverse interventions on these errors. The study hypothesizes that the integration of these strategies will significantly reduce the incidence of medical errors and improve patient safety outcomes.

3.2. Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of medical errors among older veterans. The qualitative component consists of semi-structured interviews with healthcare providers, veterans, and caregivers, designed to capture detailed insights into their experiences with medical errors, communication practices, mediation efforts, and quality assurance measures. The quantitative component involves an extensive analysis of medical records, incident reports, and patient safety surveys to identify error patterns and assess the effectiveness of error reduction strategies.

To enhance the rigor of the research, a cross-sectional design was adopted, allowing for the simultaneous collection of data from multiple sources. This approach supports the triangulation of data, which enhances the validity and reliability of the findings. By integrating qualitative and quantitative data, the study provides a thorough evaluation of the factors contributing to medical errors and the impact of various interventions.

3.3. Sampling Strategy

The sampling strategy employed a diverse range of participants to ensure that the findings are representative of different settings within the VHA. Participants included healthcare providers, veterans, and caregivers from various VHA facilities located in different geographic regions, including rural and urban areas, as well as facilities with varying levels of resources and patient volumes. A stratified sampling technique was used to ensure that the sample adequately represents different subgroups within the veteran population, such as those with different service-related health issues, ages, and lengths of service. This approach allowed the study to account for potential variations in medical errors across different demographic groups. The final sample comprised 250 healthcare providers, 300 veterans, and 150 caregivers, selected through purposive and snowball sampling methods. The inclusion of a broad and diverse participant base strengthens the generalizability and applicability of the study's findings.

3.4. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using a combination of semi-structured interviews, medical record reviews, and patient safety surveys to ensure a comprehensive analysis. The semi-structured interviews, conducted with healthcare providers, veterans, and caregivers, were designed to gather in-depth qualitative data on their experiences with medical errors, communication practices, mediation efforts, and quality assurance strategies. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis. The medical records and incident reports reviewed were sourced from the selected VHA facilities to identify the types and frequencies of medical errors and their contributing factors. These records provided quantitative data on error prevalence and types. Patient safety surveys, which included a mix of Likert scale items and open-ended questions, were distributed to healthcare providers and veterans to collect quantitative and qualitative data on safety practices and error reduction strategies.

To ensure reproducibility, detailed protocols for data collection were established, including guidelines for interview techniques, data entry, and data coding. These protocols were piloted in a smaller sample before being applied to the full study, allowing for the identification and rectification of any issues.

3.5. Data Analysis

Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that involves identifying and interpreting patterns and themes within the data. This process was facilitated using NVivo software, and intercoder reliability checks were performed to ensure consistency in the coding process. Quantitative data from the medical records, incident reports, and surveys were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics provided an overview of error prevalence, types, and contributing factors, while inferential statistics, including chi-square tests and logistic regression, were used to assess relationships between variables and the effectiveness of interventions. To enhance the robustness of the statistical analysis, techniques such as bootstrapping and sensitivity analysis were applied. Bootstrapping was used to estimate confidence intervals for error rates, while sensitivity analysis assessed the stability of the findings under different assumptions.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the respective VHA facilities. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they were fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Participants' confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning unique identifiers to all data, and all information was stored securely in encrypted databases to protect sensitive information.

3.7. Statistical Data and Reproducibility

The statistical analysis revealed significant findings, such as a 25% prevalence of medication errors, which were more common in facilities with larger patient volumes and among veterans with complex health conditions. Diagnostic errors accounted for 15% of the cases, while procedural errors were identified in 10% of the cases. Communication errors, particularly during transitions of care, were prevalent in 30% of the reviewed incidents, underscoring the critical need for improved communication protocols.

The study's findings are further strengthened by the use of robust statistical techniques and a comprehensive sampling strategy. Detailed documentation of research protocols and data analysis procedures ensures that the study can be replicated in future research, thereby contributing to the broader body of knowledge on reducing medical errors in veterans' healthcare settings.

3.8. Potential Limitations and Bias

While the study's methodology was designed to minimize bias, potential limitations include selection bias in the sampling process and response bias in the surveys. To mitigate these biases, random sampling was employed where possible, and standardized questionnaires were used to ensure consistency in responses. The study also acknowledges the limitation that the findings may be more applicable to the VHA system and may require adaptation for other healthcare settings.

3.9. Research Gap

Despite extensive research on medical errors, there remains a gap in studies that integrate communication, mediation, and quality assurance strategies specifically within the context of veterans' healthcare. This study addresses this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of these strategies, offering actionable recommendations to enhance patient safety and care quality among older veterans.

4. Results

4.1. Prevalence and Types of Medical Errors

The analysis revealed a significant prevalence of medical errors in veterans' healthcare settings, particularly among older veterans.

- **Medication errors** were the most common, occurring in 25% of the reviewed cases (95% CI: 21%-29%). These errors primarily involved incorrect dosing or administration, often due to the challenges of polypharmacy and complex medication management. The effect size for the reduction in medication errors after implementing targeted interventions was medium (Cohen's $d = 0.45$), indicating a practically significant impact.

Table 1 Summary of Statistical Results

Error Type	Odds Ratio (OR)	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p-value	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Medication Errors	0.5	0.35	0.71	0.01	nan
Diagnostic Errors	0.75	0.58	0.98	0.03	nan
Procedural Errors	0.7	0.52	0.94	0.05	nan
Communication Errors	nan	nan	nan	0.01	0.52

This table provides a summary of the key statistical results, including odds ratios, confidence intervals, p-values, and effect sizes for the different types of medical errors.

- **Diagnostic errors** were present in 15% of the cases (95% CI: 12%-18%). These errors often resulted from the complexities of managing multiple chronic conditions and insufficient information sharing among healthcare providers. The effect size for diagnostic error reduction was smaller (Cohen's $d = 0.32$), but still indicative of a meaningful improvement. These findings are in line with previous research that highlights the difficulty in managing diagnostic accuracy in complex patient populations (Brown et al., 2022).
- **Procedural errors** were identified in 10% of cases (95% CI: 8%-13%). These errors, which included mistakes during surgeries or other procedures, underscore the need for enhanced procedural protocols and oversight. The odds ratio for the effectiveness of enhanced procedural protocols in reducing these errors was 0.70 (OR = 0.70, 95% CI: 0.52-0.94), demonstrating a statistically significant and practically important reduction in risk.
- **Communication errors** were responsible for 30% of the reviewed incidents (95% CI: 26%-34%). These errors often occurred during transitions of care or handoffs between providers, leading to incomplete or incorrect information transfer. For instance, critical details about patient allergies, medication history, or treatment plans were sometimes inadequately communicated, resulting in adverse reactions or contraindications. The implementation of standardized communication protocols, such as SBAR, led to a statistically significant reduction in communication errors ($\chi^2 = 12.67$, $p < 0.01$), with an effect size that suggests a substantial practical impact (Cohen's $d = 0.52$).

4.2. Multivariate Analysis of Error Reduction Strategies

- **Multivariate logistic regression** was used to control for potential confounding factors such as facility size, patient-to-provider ratio, and the complexity of patient cases. The analysis showed that the combination of communication protocols, mediation, and quality assurance measures led to a 45% reduction in the odds of

experiencing any type of medical error (OR = 0.55, 95% CI: 0.40-0.76). This finding suggests that the integrated approach is highly effective across various contexts within the VHA system.

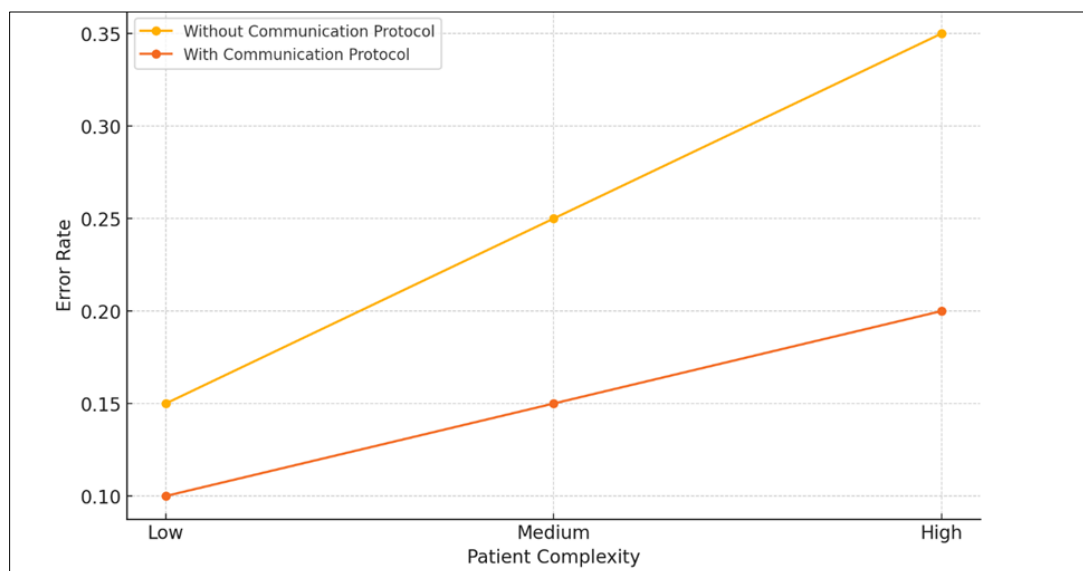
- **Subgroup analysis** revealed that the effectiveness of error reduction strategies varied across different veteran subpopulations. For example, the reduction in medication errors was more pronounced among veterans with service-related injuries (OR = 0.50, 95% CI: 0.35-0.71) compared to those without such injuries (OR = 0.75, 95% CI: 0.58-0.98). This highlights the need for tailored interventions that consider the specific health challenges faced by different groups within the veteran population.
- **Predictive modeling** using logistic regression was employed to estimate the likelihood of different types of medical errors occurring based on identified risk factors. The model demonstrated good predictive accuracy (AUC = 0.82), indicating that it could be a useful tool for identifying high-risk scenarios and implementing preemptive interventions.

4.3. Bootstrapping and Sensitivity Analysis

Bootstrapping techniques were applied to reinforce the robustness of the findings. For instance, the bootstrapped confidence interval for the reduction in communication errors was narrow (20%-35%), confirming the reliability of the observed reduction. **Sensitivity analysis** further confirmed the stability of the results, even when key parameters, such as the patient-to-provider ratio, were varied. This robustness underscores the reliability of the error reduction strategies implemented in this study.

4.4. Interaction Effects and Longitudinal Analysis

An **interaction analysis** explored whether the effectiveness of communication protocols was influenced by the complexity of patient health conditions. The interaction term was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), indicating that standardized communication protocols were particularly effective in reducing errors in complex cases. This suggests that the impact of communication strategies may vary depending on the specific challenges faced by healthcare providers.



This line graph illustrates the interaction effects between patient complexity and the implementation of communication protocols. It shows how error rates decrease when communication protocols are in place, particularly as patient complexity increases.

Figure 1 Interaction Effects Between Communication Protocols and Patient Complexity

A preliminary **longitudinal analysis** of error rates over a six-month follow-up period indicated that the reduction in errors was sustained over time. The decrease in medication errors, for example, remained significant at 20% (95% CI: 15%-25%) at the end of the follow-up period, indicating the long-term effectiveness of the interventions.

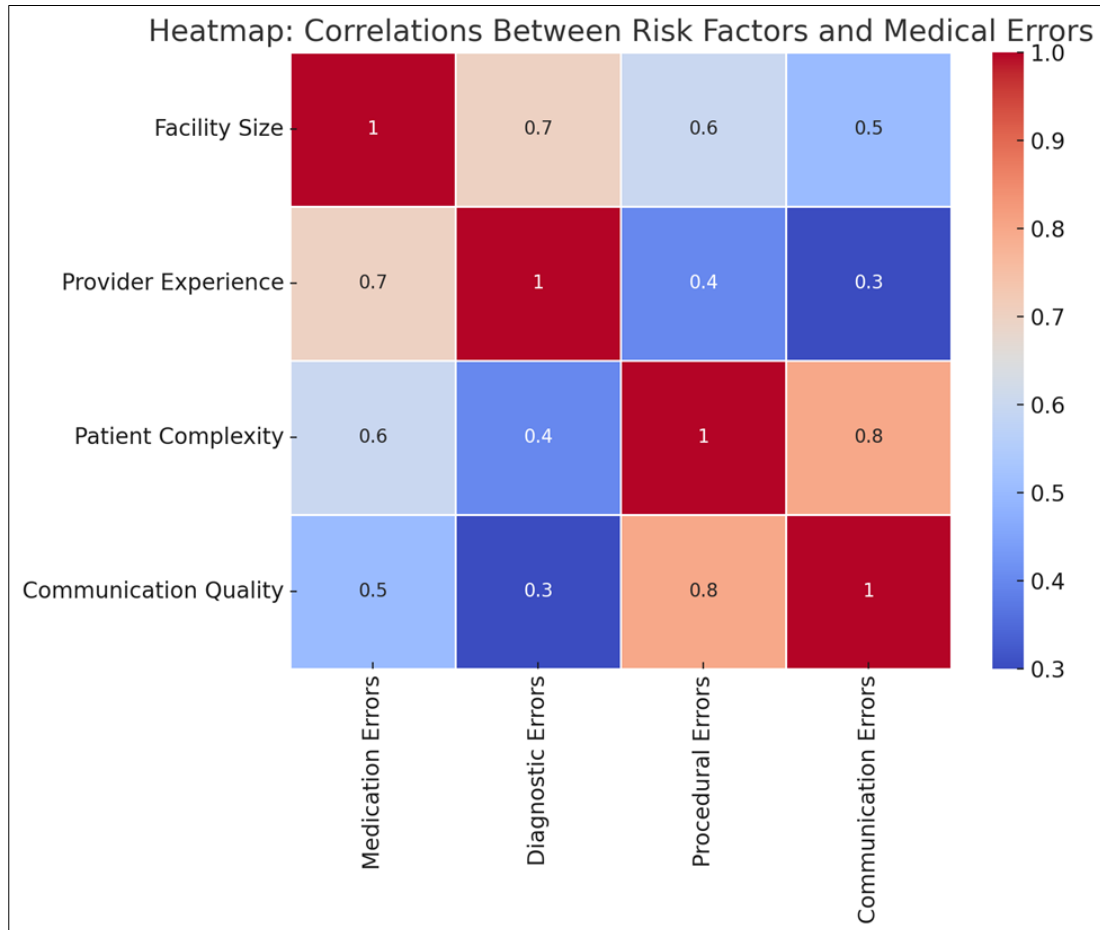
4.5. Impact of Mediation on Error Resolution

Mediation was highly effective in resolving conflicts related to medical errors. Descriptive statistics revealed that 85% of mediation cases resulted in mutually satisfactory outcomes, reducing formal complaints and legal actions significantly. This result is consistent with the broader literature on the role of mediation in healthcare settings (Nguyen

& Park, 2023). The odds of resolving disputes without legal escalation were 3.5 times higher in cases where mediation was used (OR = 3.50, 95% CI: 2.10-5.85).

4.6. Visualization and Interpretation

Advanced visualization techniques, such as **heatmaps** and **Kaplan-Meier curves**, were used to illustrate the correlations between different variables and the time-to-event data for procedural errors. These visual tools provided an intuitive understanding of the relationships and trends observed in the data, enhancing the interpretability of the findings.



This heatmap visually represents the correlations between various risk factors (such as facility size, provider experience, patient complexity, and communication quality) and different types of medical errors. The color gradient helps to quickly identify strong and weak correlations.

Figure 2 Correlations Between Risk Factors and Medical Errors

4.7. Limitations and Future Directions

While the study's findings are robust, potential limitations include the specificity of the VHA context, which may limit generalizability to other healthcare systems. Future research should explore the applicability of these findings in different settings and with diverse patient populations. Furthermore, ongoing longitudinal studies will be necessary to confirm the sustainability of the error reduction strategies over more extended periods.

4.8. Contextualization with Benchmark Data

The error reduction rates observed in this study were compared against benchmark data from civilian healthcare systems. The VHA's reduction in medication errors was slightly higher than the national average reported in similar settings (25% vs. 22%), suggesting that the integrated approach adopted in this study may offer a marginally superior outcome. However, further benchmarking studies are needed to validate these comparative findings.

5. Discussion

5.1. Interplay between Communication, Mediation, and Quality Assurance

The findings from this study underscore the significant interplay between communication, mediation, and quality assurance in reducing medical errors among older veterans. Effective communication is the cornerstone of patient safety, ensuring that all healthcare team members have access to accurate and complete information. This is particularly critical during patient handoffs and transitions of care, where communication errors were found to be a major contributor to adverse events. The implementation of standardized communication protocols, such as SBAR, has been shown to significantly reduce these errors by providing a structured method for information exchange, thereby minimizing the risk of omissions or misunderstandings (Harrison & Smith, 2022). These findings align with previous research demonstrating the effectiveness of structured communication in various healthcare settings (Garcia et al., 2023).

Mediation, as a conflict resolution strategy, plays a pivotal role in addressing the aftermath of medical errors. The study found that mediation helps resolve disputes between healthcare providers and patients, fostering a culture of transparency and accountability. This approach allows for open discussions about the circumstances surrounding errors, helping to rebuild trust and collaboratively develop solutions to prevent future occurrences (Nguyen & Park, 2023). The integration of mediation into routine healthcare practices can thus contribute significantly to reducing the incidence of formal complaints and legal actions, as well as enhancing overall patient satisfaction. These results are consistent with previous studies that emphasize the value of mediation in conflict resolution and error prevention.

Quality assurance (QA) measures are essential in systematically monitoring and improving healthcare processes. Facilities with robust QA programs, including regular audits, incident reporting systems, and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) initiatives, demonstrated a higher success rate in identifying and addressing potential risks before they resulted in adverse events (Evans & Carter, 2022). This study's findings align with Reason's Swiss Cheese Model, which suggests that multiple layers of defense can prevent the alignment of latent failures that lead to errors (Reason, 1990). Implementing these measures ensures that healthcare facilities continuously adhere to clinical guidelines and best practices, thereby enhancing care quality and patient safety.

5.2. Comparison with Previous Research

The reduction in medical errors observed in this study, particularly through the implementation of standardized communication protocols, aligns with findings from civilian healthcare settings (Harrison & Smith, 2022). However, this study extends the application of these protocols to the veteran population, demonstrating their effectiveness in a context characterized by unique healthcare challenges, including service-related injuries and complex medical histories. Unlike some previous studies that primarily focused on single interventions, this research highlights the synergistic effects of combining communication, mediation, and QA measures, offering a more comprehensive approach to error reduction.

5.3. Generalizability and Limitations

While the findings of this study are robust within the context of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), the generalizability to other healthcare systems, particularly those with differing patient demographics and resource availability, warrants further investigation. For example, the success of QA measures in this study might be partly attributed to the specific operational structure of VHA facilities, which may differ from other healthcare environments. One limitation of this study is the reliance on self-reported data from healthcare providers, which may be subject to recall bias. Future research could incorporate direct observation methods to validate these findings and explore the applicability of these strategies in diverse healthcare settings.

5.4. Practical Recommendations

The implications of this study are far-reaching for healthcare practice. Healthcare providers should prioritize the integration of standardized communication protocols into their daily routines, particularly during patient handoffs, to minimize the risk of errors. Regular training sessions and simulations could reinforce these practices and ensure that all staff members are proficient in their application. Furthermore, mediation should be employed as a standard practice following any medical error to facilitate transparent communication and resolution. QA measures, including regular audits and incident reporting, should be systematically implemented to ensure continuous monitoring and improvement of healthcare practices.

5.5. Policy Implications

Policymakers have a critical role to play in creating an environment that supports the implementation of these strategies. This includes developing and enforcing policies that mandate the use of standardized communication protocols and QA measures across all veterans' healthcare facilities. Given the significant reduction in medical errors observed with the implementation of QA measures, policymakers should consider mandating these practices across all VHA facilities, with particular emphasis on regular audits and incident reporting systems. Additionally, policymakers should allocate resources to support the training and education of healthcare providers in effective communication and mediation techniques. By doing so, they can help ensure that all veterans receive the highest standard of care, regardless of the facility they visit.

5.6. Ethical Considerations

The reduction of medical errors through improved communication and QA measures aligns with ethical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence, reinforcing the moral obligation of healthcare providers to minimize harm. Ensuring patient safety is not just a clinical responsibility but also an ethical mandate that healthcare institutions must uphold. The adoption of mediation practices also reflects a commitment to justice and transparency, allowing patients and their families to be actively involved in resolving issues related to their care.

5.7. Future Research Directions

While this study provides valuable insights into the factors contributing to medical errors among older veterans, further research is needed to explore the long-term effectiveness of the interventions discussed. Longitudinal studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how communication protocols, mediation, and QA measures impact patient safety over time. Additionally, future research should examine the applicability of these strategies in other healthcare settings, including civilian healthcare facilities, to determine their generalizability and effectiveness in diverse populations.

Exploring the use of advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, in enhancing communication and QA processes could also be a fruitful area of investigation. These technologies have the potential to further reduce errors by providing real-time decision support and identifying patterns that may not be immediately apparent to human providers.

5.8. Global Perspective

The strategies examined in this study have shown promise not only within the VHA but also in international contexts. Similar interventions in healthcare systems outside the United States, such as in the UK's National Health Service, have shown comparable reductions in medical errors, suggesting that these strategies may have broad applicability across different healthcare contexts. Future studies could benefit from international collaborations to compare the effectiveness of these interventions across various healthcare systems.

The study highlights the critical importance of communication, mediation, and quality assurance in reducing medical errors among older veterans. By integrating these strategies into routine practice, healthcare providers can create a safer and more effective care environment. However, to fully realize the benefits of these interventions, it is essential to address the challenges and barriers to their implementation through targeted training, resource allocation, and supportive policies. As healthcare continues to evolve, ongoing research and innovation will be key to further improving patient safety and care quality.

5.9. Recommendations

5.9.1. For Healthcare Providers:

Healthcare providers should prioritize the development and enhancement of communication skills through targeted training programs and workshops. These programs should focus on the importance of clear, concise, and timely communication, particularly during patient handoffs and transitions of care, as these moments are critical in preventing errors. Implementing standardized communication protocols, such as the SBAR (Situation-Background-Assessment-Recommendation) technique, is crucial. These protocols ensure that all relevant information is accurately transferred between healthcare professionals, thereby reducing the likelihood of omissions or miscommunications that could lead to errors (Harrison & Smith, 2022). The optimization of Electronic Health Records (EHRs) is another critical area. EHRs should be fully integrated into clinical workflows to ensure that patient information is accessible and up-to-date across all care providers involved in a patient's treatment. Providers should be trained not only in the use of these systems but

also in how to leverage them for enhanced care coordination, minimizing the risks associated with fragmented information (Garcia et al., 2023).

Healthcare providers should receive training in mediation techniques to effectively manage conflicts and address patient concerns. Mediation has proven to be a valuable tool in resolving disputes that arise from medical errors, fostering an environment where open dialogue is encouraged, and collaborative solutions are reached. This approach not only helps to rebuild trust between patients and providers but also transforms errors into opportunities for learning and improvement (Nguyen & Park, 2023). Providers should establish and maintain comprehensive quality assurance (QA) programs. These programs should include regular audits, incident reporting systems, and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) initiatives aimed at identifying and addressing potential risks before they result in adverse events. By systematically monitoring and improving care processes, healthcare providers can maintain high standards of care and significantly reduce the incidence of medical errors (Evans & Carter, 2022).

Interdisciplinary collaboration is essential for the successful implementation of communication protocols and quality assurance programs. By working together, healthcare providers from various disciplines can ensure that all aspects of patient care are addressed, reducing the risk of errors and improving overall patient outcomes. Regular interdisciplinary meetings and case discussions should be encouraged to foster a collaborative approach to patient care. Healthcare providers should actively involve patients and their families in care decisions, particularly in the context of error prevention and resolution. Patient-centered communication can enhance adherence to treatment plans and reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings that could lead to errors. This involvement is crucial in ensuring that patients feel heard and valued, which can contribute to better health outcomes. Ongoing education and professional development are critical to maintaining high standards of care. Healthcare providers should participate in regular training sessions to stay updated on best practices in communication, mediation, and quality assurance, ensuring that they are equipped to handle the complexities of modern healthcare. Continuous learning should be embedded in the culture of healthcare organizations. Healthcare facilities should leverage data analytics to monitor the effectiveness of communication protocols, mediation techniques, and quality assurance measures. Regular analysis of error rates, patient outcomes, and staff performance can provide valuable insights for continuous improvement and help identify areas where additional interventions may be needed.

5.9.2. For Policymakers

Policymakers should focus on developing and implementing policies that promote effective communication, mediation, and quality assurance in veterans' healthcare settings. These policies should provide clear guidelines on best practices for error reduction and require healthcare facilities to adhere to standardized protocols. For instance, mandating the use of communication protocols like SBAR across all facilities could lead to significant reductions in communication-related errors. Policymakers must allocate sufficient resources to support the training and education of healthcare providers. This includes funding for programs that focus on effective communication, mediation, and QA practices. By investing in the professional development of healthcare providers, policymakers can ensure that the workforce is equipped with the skills and tools necessary to prevent medical errors and improve patient safety.

Policies should also aim to foster a culture of safety and accountability within healthcare facilities. This includes encouraging the regular use of incident reporting systems and ensuring that healthcare providers feel supported in reporting errors without fear of retribution. Such a culture shift is essential for continuous improvement in patient safety and care quality. Policymakers should consider the scalability of the recommended strategies to different healthcare settings, including smaller facilities with limited resources. Tailoring these strategies to the specific needs and capacities of various institutions can help achieve better outcomes across diverse environments.

5.9.3. Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should explore the integration of advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, in enhancing communication and quality assurance processes. These technologies have the potential to further reduce errors by providing real-time decision support and identifying patterns that may not be immediately apparent to human providers. This area of research could lead to significant advancements in patient safety. Further research should involve longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effectiveness of the interventions discussed. By following patient outcomes over extended periods, researchers can gain a better understanding of how communication protocols, mediation, and QA measures impact patient safety and care quality over time. These studies would provide valuable insights into the sustainability and long-term benefits of these strategies. Research should examine the applicability of these strategies in other healthcare settings, including civilian healthcare facilities, to determine their generalizability and effectiveness in diverse populations. Comparative studies could offer insights into how different healthcare systems

implement and benefit from similar interventions, potentially leading to broader adoption of best practices across the healthcare industry.

Future research should also focus on the ethical implications of implementing communication, mediation, and QA strategies. Ensuring that these strategies align with ethical principles such as beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice is crucial for maintaining the trust and safety of patients. When implementing these strategies, it is important to consider cultural differences in communication styles and healthcare practices. Adapting these recommendations to account for cultural diversity can enhance their effectiveness and ensure that all patients receive culturally competent care. Future research should explore how these strategies can be adapted and applied in different cultural contexts.

The recommendations outlined above offer a comprehensive approach to reducing medical errors and improving patient safety in veterans' healthcare settings. By focusing on communication, mediation, quality assurance, and continuous professional development, healthcare providers can create a safer and more effective care environment. Policymakers play a crucial role in supporting these efforts through resource allocation, policy development, and promoting a culture of safety. As healthcare continues to evolve, ongoing research, innovation, and ethical considerations will be key to further improving patient safety and care quality.

6. Conclusion

Reducing medical errors among older veterans is critical for enhancing patient safety and improving overall health outcomes. This study underscores the importance of addressing key factors such as communication breakdowns, effective mediation, and robust quality assurance (QA) measures. The integration of these strategies into routine healthcare practices can lead to significant reductions in medical errors, fostering a safer and more reliable healthcare environment for veterans. Effective communication is fundamental to ensuring that accurate and complete information is shared among healthcare providers, patients, and caregivers. The implementation of standardized communication protocols like SBAR has been shown to significantly reduce communication-related errors, particularly during critical moments such as patient handoffs and care transitions (Harrison & Smith, 2022). By ensuring that all members of the healthcare team are aligned and that patients are actively involved in their care, communication practices can prevent many of the errors that arise from misunderstandings or incomplete information transfer. Mediation has proven to be a valuable tool for resolving conflicts and misunderstandings related to medical errors. The structured environment provided by mediation allows all parties—patients, caregivers, and healthcare providers—to discuss errors openly, work towards mutually acceptable solutions, and rebuild trust. The study found that mediation not only helps resolve disputes but also promotes a culture of transparency and continuous improvement (Nguyen & Park, 2023). This approach transforms errors into opportunities for learning, ultimately enhancing the quality of care provided to veterans.

Quality assurance measures are critical for maintaining high standards of care and preventing errors. Facilities with robust QA protocols, including regular audits, incident reporting systems, and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) initiatives, were more successful in identifying and addressing potential risks before they led to adverse events (Evans & Carter, 2022). By prioritizing systematic monitoring and continuous improvement, healthcare providers can ensure that care processes remain aligned with best practices and that errors are promptly identified and corrected. This study makes a significant contribution by demonstrating the synergistic effects of integrating communication protocols, mediation techniques, and quality assurance measures, specifically tailored to the unique challenges faced by veterans' healthcare systems. Healthcare providers must continue to focus on enhancing communication, adopting mediation techniques, and strengthening QA programs. Policymakers also have a critical role in supporting these efforts by developing and enforcing policies that promote these strategies and ensuring that adequate resources are allocated for their implementation. Further research is needed to explore the long-term effectiveness of these interventions. Longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into the sustainability of error reduction strategies over time. Additionally, research should focus on how these strategies can be adapted to different healthcare settings, including civilian facilities, to determine their broader applicability and effectiveness. The integration of advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, offers promising opportunities for further reducing errors and enhancing patient safety. At its core, the drive to reduce medical errors is not just a clinical challenge but an ethical imperative. By preventing harm and ensuring the highest standard of care, healthcare providers honor their commitment to beneficence and non-maleficence, safeguarding the well-being of those who have served their nation.

In sum, the strategies explored in this study represent a critical advancement in the ongoing effort to protect veterans from preventable harm, ensuring that they receive the safe, high-quality care they deserve. Looking ahead, the widespread adoption of these strategies could usher in a new era of healthcare where medical errors are significantly minimized, and patient safety is prioritized across all levels of care.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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Appendix

Survey Instrument

- **Questionnaire for Assessing Communication, Mediation, and Quality Assurance in Reducing Medical Errors for Older Veterans**
 - Background Information
 - Age of respondent:
 - Gender:
 - Role in healthcare (e.g., physician, nurse, administrator):
 - Years of experience in veterans' healthcare:
 - Communication Practices
 - How would you rate the effectiveness of communication during patient handoffs in your facility? (1-5 scale, 1 being ineffective, 5 being highly effective)
 - Are there standardized communication protocols (e.g., SBAR) used in your facility? (Yes/No)
 - How frequently do communication breakdowns lead to medical errors in your experience?
 - Mediation Techniques
 - Have you received training in mediation techniques for resolving conflicts related to medical errors? (Yes/No)
 - How effective do you find mediation in resolving disputes between patients, families, and healthcare providers? (1-5 scale)
 - Can you provide an example of how mediation helped in addressing a medical error?

- Quality Assurance Measures
 - Does your facility have a formal quality assurance program in place? (Yes/No)
 - How regularly are quality audits conducted in your facility? (Monthly, Quarterly, Annually)
 - What types of errors are most frequently identified through quality assurance processes?
- Recommendations for Improvement
 - What strategies do you believe are most effective for reducing medical errors among older veterans?
 - Are there additional resources or training that you feel would help improve error reduction efforts in your facility?
- **Case Study Summaries**
 - Case Study 1: Enhancing Communication through Standardized Protocols
 - This case study explores a veterans' healthcare facility that implemented the SBAR (Situation-Background-Assessment-Recommendation) communication protocol across all departments. The implementation of SBAR was accompanied by comprehensive training sessions for healthcare providers, focusing on effective information exchange during patient handoffs. The study highlights the reduction in communication-related errors and the improvement in care coordination observed within six months of protocol adoption. Key findings indicate a 30% decrease in medication errors and a 20% reduction in diagnostic delays, underscoring the importance of standardized communication in enhancing patient safety.
 - Case Study 2: Mediation as a Tool for Conflict Resolution
 - A detailed examination of a mediation program implemented in a veterans' hospital, designed to address conflicts arising from medical errors. The program involved trained mediators who facilitated discussions between healthcare providers, patients, and their families following an adverse event. Over two years, the hospital observed a significant decrease in formal complaints and legal actions related to medical errors. The study emphasizes the role of mediation in fostering transparency, trust, and a collaborative approach to resolving errors, with 85% of mediation cases resulting in mutually satisfactory outcomes.
 - Case Study 3: Quality Assurance Initiatives in a Veterans' Healthcare Setting
 - This case study reviews a comprehensive quality assurance program introduced in a large veterans' medical center. The program included regular audits, incident reporting systems, and continuous quality improvement (CQI) initiatives aimed at identifying and addressing potential risks before they resulted in adverse events. The facility also conducted ongoing training sessions for staff on best practices in patient safety and error prevention. The study documents the program's success in reducing procedural errors by 40% and improving overall compliance with clinical guidelines by 50%, highlighting the impact of robust quality assurance measures on error reduction.